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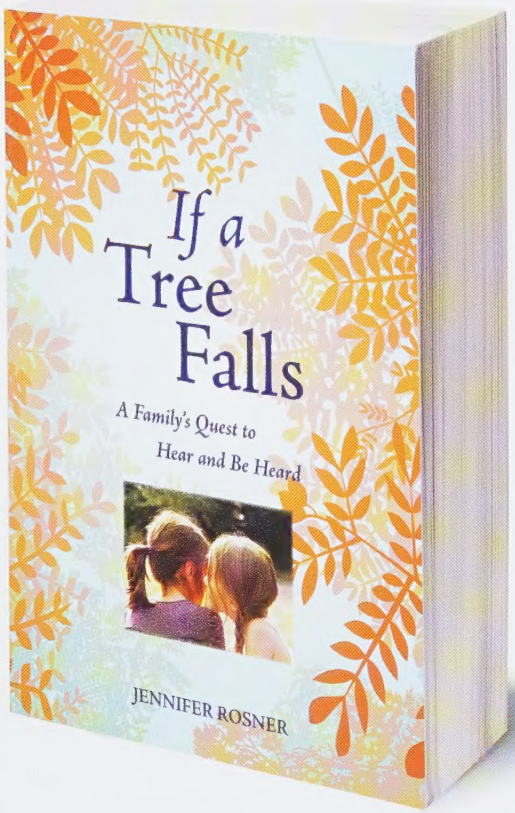

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JENNIFER ROSNER

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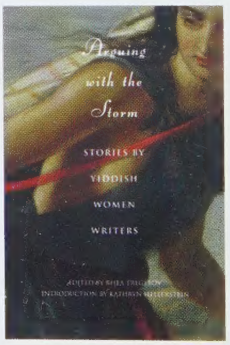

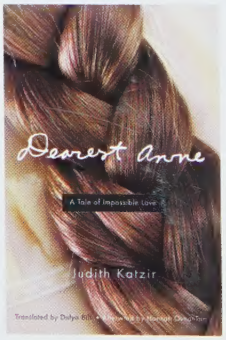

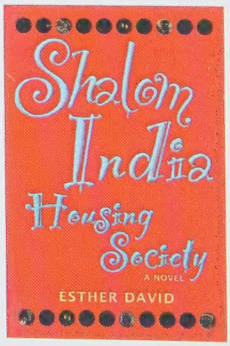

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Lilith

spring 2010
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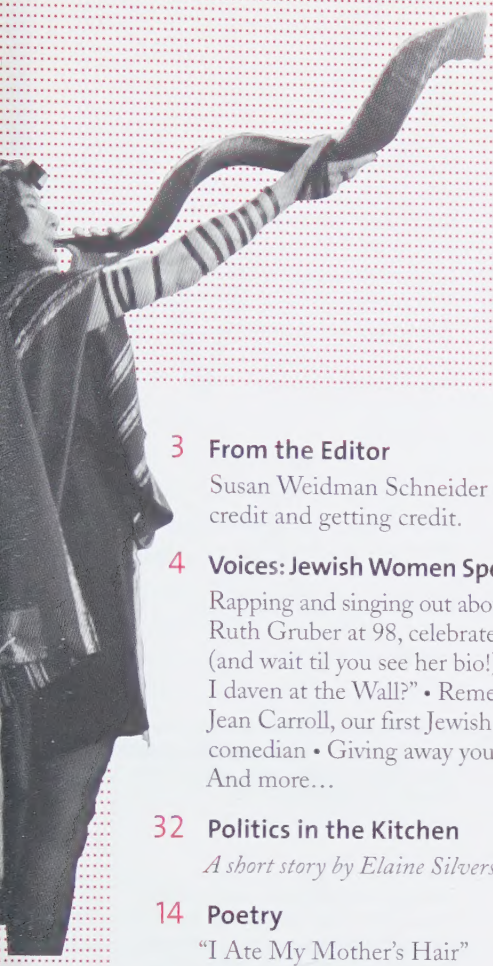
In the Garden of Eden, long before the eating of the apple, the Holy One created the first human beings—a man, Adam, and a woman, Lilith. Lilith said, "We are equal because we are created from the same earth."

Alphabet of Ben Sira, 23a-b



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Cover photo: Jacob Okada, from the documentary film "Off and Running."

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PHOTO: RACHEL M. SCHNEIDER

Crazy language? Time for truth-in-speaking

Waiting for the Metro in Washington, D.C., I was whiling away the 3 minutes between trains reading the brightly backlit, strategically placed ads. Washington is a company town, and the ads are often for products or ideas intended to help shift public thinking in a way you don't usually see in, say, the Times Square subway station—ads for military helicopters or for participants in NIH clinical trials. Usually, my eyes glaze over. This time I was riveted by series of rectangles, each with a different photograph, proclaiming: "VISA: Digital Currency." One photo showed a classroom, and said that by using "digital currency" you could help support efforts to teach financial literacy to schoolchildren. Another praised the convenience (for riders) and safety (for cabbies) of being able to use digital currency in lieu of cash in New York City taxis. A third claimed great savings for government agencies when they paid their bills using digital currency.

The fact that the phrase "credit cards" appeared nowhere in these billboard ads seemed a jangling omission. The concept of credit is now anathema, and "credit card"—the plastic that has drawn many into the quicksand of ballooning debt—has, in these ads, become the new "c" word: a curse never mentioned directly and barely even alluded to, like cancer 40 years ago.

What a genius is the marketing person is who came up with the idea to inspire people to use the cleaner, simpler "digital currency" rather than—*feh*!—credit cards. It's even better than calling a used car "pre-owned."

My admiration for the brazen cleverness of the VISA campaign mixed with my horror at its contorted language. I steam over the theft of meaning embedded in terms like "right to life," so my wonderment at this repurposing of language didn't feel new to me. I've ruminated on this pretty often. You probably have, too.

But then I started to think about the word *credit*, and about the anger of a woman who'd come up to me after one of my talks. I always take pleasure in telling audiences where my information comes from. Attribution seems not only honest (like footnotes in academic research), but an important part of a feminist tradition of naming the provenance of our ideas and tracking how thinking spreads. So I'd mentioned how Susan Schnur created a wonderful Miriam's Cup blessing to add to Passover's seder rituals. And how Marcia Falk and others have helped Jews re-think the language of our liturgy, both in Hebrew and in English. And so on; you get it. Well, this woman hated what she called my "name-dropping." What I had considered simply the sourcing of fresh thinking she thought of as boasting about people whose work I admire.

Fast forward from that Baltimore exchange to an evening in New York this March. In the 1970s, New York UJA-Federation created, initially under the leadership of Blu Greenberg, an ongoing occasion for women to meet and discuss gender issues face to face. Originally called The Task Force on the Role of the Jewish Woman in a Changing Society (it was, after all, the1970s), and later renamed the Task Force on Women, UJA-Federation recently announced it can no longer afford to staff the program, which enabled an unusual and regular cross-fertilization of female volunteers, professionals working in the Jewish community, writers, activists, Orthodox women and women whose beliefs range far to the left of Orthodoxy, all gathering congenially. Nothing was off-limits to the group's discussions: naming the glass ceiling of Jewish leadership discrimination, exposing the rate of domestic violence among Jews, opening up communication between female *machers* and the women employed by their organizations, acting out one of the first-ever community productions of Eve Ensler's "Vagina Monologues" to a packed Manhattan theater. The swan song for the task force featured wine, women and talk, and the talk was largely about *giving credit*. Every person who got up spoke about the women who'd influenced her, who'd "come before," who'd opened her eyes or shaped her thinking.

Virginia Woolf famously said that a woman writing "thinks back through her mothers." This line became the epigraph to *Her Mothers*, the 1975 novel by E.M. Broner (to drop another name). Let's remember Woolf's wisdom in an era when loony nomenclature like "digital currency" threatens to conceal the very nature of where things like money come from. A return to truth-in-speaking is in order. You can leave your credit cards in your purse (except, of course, when purchasing Lilith subscriptions), but don't forget to give credit, and take credit, where credit is due. One very direct way to make sure women's contributions are recognized is simply to name the women who've made them.

Susan

Susan Weidman Schneider
Editor in Chief

VOICES

Traditionally the voice of a Jewish woman was not to be heard in public, lest it arouse men. These pages are for news about Jewish women in our own strong voices.

A Legacy: Holocaust Education

Luna Kaufman, awarded an honorary doctorate by Seton Hall University last spring for her work in interfaith Holocaust education, was teaching about the Holocaust in an inner-city school in Newark, N.J. when one of the children asked "Why don't you write a book?" Their teacher said, "These kids, who have never held a book in their hands," thought she should memorialize her experiences in a book! That was 20 years ago, and now the book is out: *Luna's Life*.

Kaufman was born in Poland in 1926 to a fourth-generation Krakow Jewish family. She, her parents and her older sister were interned in the Krakow Ghetto, then Plaszow, Hasag-Skarzysko and Leipzig concentration camps. Her father and sister were deported to Auschwitz, and were murdered in the camps along with 70 other family members; Luna and her mother managed to spend the war years together. Despite her horrific experiences—or, she writes, because of them—Kaufman has been drawn to efforts to create intergroup understanding; she's the chair emerita of Seton Hall's Sister Rose Thering Endowment for Jewish-Christian and Holocaust Studies.

Photographer **Joan Roth** first met Kaufman when a Holocaust exhibition needed "someone to do a mitzvah"—to pick up from Kaufman her prison dress from Hasag, the work camp site for the German munitions company. Kaufman said that when she'd been given the dress she had to give up her prized possession—the "remodeled suit" she had created from a school coat.

"She was so cherubic, her hair wrapped up in a braid, emanating a certain kind of joy." When Roth noticed her necklace, a design incorporating both a cross and a Star of David, Kaufman told Roth that she always felt that people with differences should be able to live together. The necklace, it turns out, is a replica of one the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem had commissioned for **Sister Rose** (1920–2006), whose mission, Kaufman said, was to "root out anti-Semitism wherever it exists. Holocaust education was her lasting legacy." In that tradition, Kaufman is now writing a children's book featuring the coat that she changed into a suit.

SUSAN WEIDMAN SCHNEIDER

PHOTO: JOAN ROTH

Transgressive Comedy

Jean Carroll, trailblazing Jewish comedienne, was born **Celine Zeigman** in Paris on Jan. 7, 1911, into a struggling Jewish family making its way across Europe to the golden land of America. Recollecting her less-than-happy childhood, she later said that a memory of her father flinging his dinner at her mother made her decide never to be beholden to a man.

Celine, spunky and determined, snagged several $5 prizes as a child dancer in amateur nights at theaters in New York and then moved into vaudeville, where her pretty face and figure were definite assets. She married fellow performer **Buddy Howe**, and they partnered in a dance act. When he went into the Army during World War II, she was forced to go solo. She began addressing comments to audiences and "just got better and better" at it, her daughter, **Helen Tunick**, told the Washington Post. Thus Jean Carroll, trailblazing Jewish comedienne, was born.

Carroll was known for her rapid-fire delivery, and for trespassing into the tough, traditionally male-dominated world of stand-up comedy. According to numerous comedy/entertainment websites, wearing her trademark cocktail dress and mink coat, she regaled audiences with stories of her husband, kids and her everyday life.

"People are never satisfied," she would say. Lawyers wanted to be doctors. "Single men wish they were married. Married men wish they were dead." Or she would riff on her own married life: "Tonight, you are really going to enjoy yourself," she quoted her husband as saying. "Why?" she shot back. "You leaving me?"

Sixty years ago, this was pretty transgressive stuff. Funny women either sacrificed any claim to being sexually attractive (think **Phyllis Diller** and **Totie Fields**) or they undermined their own power and authority by acting like total flakes (think **Lucille Ball**). Or else they just played straight to the funny guys, like **Gracie Allen**. But Carroll sidestepped both the scatterbrained and the homely shtick, and instead forged her own path with a persona that was funny, sexy, sassy and smart.

Working on what daughter Tunick called "a dinky, almost-impossible-to-use portable typewriter" in the family apartment, Carroll went into semi-seclusion to write her own new material whenever she needed it. And Tunick recalls the matter-of-fact way her mother approached her professional life: "She would finish cleaning the house, and then take her gown and shopping bag with her shoes and makeup and go to work."

In the 1950s, Carroll made more than 20 appearances on the Ed Sullivan Show; Sullivan had signed her for the unprecedented fee of $10,000 per show. In 1953 and 1954 she was the star of "Take It From Me," also called "The Jean Carroll Show." And Carroll's legacy still resonates today. In her recent Off- Broadway production "The J.A.P. Show: The Jewish American Princesses of Comedy," stand-up comic **Cory Kahaney** channeled her predecessors from the 1940s and 1950s; Jean Carroll was in the line-up.

Jean Carroll died on January 1, 2010, five days shy of her 99th birthday. Even near the end of her life, her sharp wit didn't desert her. Watching political campaign spots on television, she would look at the screen and say, "I'm Jean Carroll, and I approve this message."

YONA ZELDIS MCDONOUGH

"Rabbis and synagogue presidents often tell me that they don't have congregants with disabilities who require special accommodations. And in one troubling way, they may be correct—these Jews are often not present within our synagogues because they perceive they are not wanted there. How many of our synagogues have sign-language interpreters or Braille prayer books? How many offer service programs or congregational bulletins in large print? Only a select few synagogues provide religious school classes designed for children with special needs; even fewer have such classes for adults. Fewer still offer any programs, trips or religious services at all designed to include people with all types of disabilities. . . . Hasidic master the Yehudi HaKadosh said, 'Good intentions alone not accompanied by action are without value. The main thing is the action, as this is what makes the intention so profound'."

Rabbi Lynne Landsberg in "No Jew Should Be Left Behind," The Forward, February 17, 2010

"While much of the current research talks of women's difficulty in accepting the power and responsibility associated with money, Jewish women philanthropists revel in the power for creating change that their money brings them."

Joan Kaye, "Jewish Women's Philanthropy: The Big Picture," in 614:The HBI e-ZINE, January 2010

Clothing Banks

Businesses seem to have lost interest in giving unsalable clothing to the needy. Recent scandals include revelations that clothing super-chains H&M and Wal-Mart punch holes in clothes they cannot sell, thus rendering them unfit for donation to charities, recent reports in the New York Times and elsewhere reveal. (H&M, in the wake of intense media coverage and general public outcry, has committed to reversing this policy.) Even the New York City Police Department departed from a long-standing tradition last summer, when it incinerated tons of counterfeit designer clothing and footwear, which in previous years it had donated to charities like the New York City Clothing Bank.

In light of this disheartening news, the ongoing work of two organizations founded and run by Jewish women is a particularly bright beacon. As reported by the City University of New York (CUNY), Edith's Place, founded in April 2007 by **Carolyn Everett**, provides free business clothing to the neediest male and female CUNY students enrolled in employment opportunity programs who are embarking on job interviews or who have recently been hired. Edith's Place stocks everything from suits to shoes and accessories, all of it new and much of it donated through Everett's efforts, with other donations coming from local merchants. Not only do CUNY students get new clothes, they often get their own personal shopper in the form of Everett or her mother, **Edith B. Everett**, former CUNY vice-chair, as well as other volunteers.

Creative clothing tzedakah is fun for all ages, too—just ask the creators of Share What You Wear in Cleveland. **Zoe Baris** and **Samantha Zabell** (*above, left*) were sophomores in high school two years ago when they founded this now-annual event. Zabell had worked with her mother and grandmother on an adult designer clothing sale for the National Council of Jewish Women's Cleveland chapter, which ended up serving as part of the inspiration for Share What You Wear. NCJW also helped make the match between Baris and Zabell and their target population: among the many social services that NCJW runs in the area is a kinship care program. It was through this contact that the teens connected with a county-run program focused on grandparents who are the primary caregivers for grandchildren. Particularly because the state gives less financial aid to kinship care than to foster care, families in this situation often urgently need community support. "The teens collect fashionable items from friends and neighbors in a wealthier corner of the community," reported **Cynthia Cooper** in Women's e-News, and during back-to-school shopping time each of the 165 or so children it serves "shop" with fake money for the clothes they like. Last fall the project received 5,000 items. "We get T-shirts, jeans, pants, sunglasses, dresses, skirts, suits," Zabell told Cooper. "We take every item out and make sure it's not stained or ripped. We don't give them anything that we wouldn't wear."

And there's more! Swap for Good is a national project where you can host a clothing swap for your friends and raise money for your local domestic violence shelter at the same time. Shelters have lost major funding during the recession, but demands for life-saving services are on the rise. Help make a difference by hosting a Swap for Good event. *www.swapforgood.org*

MELANIE WEISS

JULIE HAYES

Was This "Mistress" a King?

Were all the rulers in ancient Israel men? A recent archeological dig in Israel says maybe not. This plaque found by Tel Aviv University archaeologists shows a mysterious woman they're labeling "Mistress of the Lionesses." Archaeologists and art historians have determined from the hairstyle and lotus flowers that this image portrays a woman, and they can tell she's a ruler by her clothing (who knew?). She may be the mystery author of letters written on clay tablets around 1350 B.C.E., sent to Pharaoh and found two decades ago in Egypt. The letters, from a woman ruler of some pre-Exodus Canaanite city, ask for military help in protecting her city from invaders, according to Science Daily. Until this plaque was found in Israel, scholars wondered which city she ruled; now they speculate she was the ruler of what is Bet Shemesh in present-day Israel.

After three years of deliberation, Transportation Minister **Yisrael Katz** [in Israel] finally responded to petitions calling for a ban on segregated buses. He ruled that the haredi [ultra-Orthodox] community may run private bus lines that separate men and women, but the state could not enforce separation on public transportation.

That may sound reasonable, except that he added that public buses in haredi neighborhoods be permitted to hang "behavior-directing" signs instructing passengers to sit separately. In other words, the buses will remain segregated, although passengers may not be forced to adhere to the separation. Really? How much less coerced will women who wish to sit up front feel with such a sign than they did earlier? Not much, I'll wager. Imagine the outcry from human rights groups here if signs like that appeared on public buses in the haredi centers of Borough Park or Monsey.

Francine Klagsbrun, "Queen Esther's Progeny Still Ride at the Back of the Bus," The Jewish Week, February 9, 2010

"Get Me a Get"

"When a marriage ends, I think what most women want is to rupture the cords with some holiness," said **Rose Zoltek-Jick** when she was ending her marriage and looking for a way to mark its termination with meaning rather than just with rancor.

A *get*, a Jewish writ of divorce, is necessary for the former partners to enact if they want to put closure on their marriage. More troublesome is that, under Jewish law, only a man can instigate a get. The divorce document he authorizes a scribe to write, under the supervision of a Bet Din, is then cut in several places so it can't be re-used. For religious Jews—and for Jews in Israel, where there's no secular marriage or divorce—the get is a key to freedom, because a woman whose husband won't or can't grant her a divorce (for example, if he is a soldier missing in action) is an *agunah*, a "chained woman." A woman whose marriage has ended and who doesn't have a get is a woman who cannot remarry under Jewish law.

Law aside, Zoltek-Jick (herself a law professor in Boston) wanted something else to signify the transition out of her marriage. So... she turned to her friends. Singer/songwriter **Rabbi Geela Rayzel Raphael** first introduced her to her husband, and was one of the witnesses to sign their Jewish marriage contract more than 25 years ago. She took the feelings Zoltek-Jick described the night before the get, added some words of her own, and set the idea to music. The chorus to her song "Get" goes like this: "Get me a get I'm moving on / Get me get it's been too long / Get me a get I'm feeling strong / Get me a get—it's freedom song." The lyrics go on with verses like "Untangle our souls, untangle our lives / Move beyond bitterness and strife." (More at *shechinah.com*.) Raphael wasn't the only pal to come through with a creative offering for Zoltek-Jick's religious divorce. A granddaughter of the late rabbi Leo Jung, the man credited with creating Modern Orthodox Judaism, **Anne Etra** wrote "The GET Rap," which she performs on a YouTube video. Here's a sample of its several verses.

Did you get the Get? Oh yeah I got it done
You see I copped a plea
at the Bet Din, officially
They cut it for me
The male hierarchy
They told me I could be free
If I paid them a fee

Snip snip snip snip
Like a circumcision
It's a big decision
You can't take it back.

PHOTOS: JOAN ROTH

Ruth Gruber at 98: Clearly Ahead of Her Time

Born in Brooklyn in 1911, **Ruth Gruber** became the youngest Ph.D. in the world (she wrote her dissertation on **Virginia Woolf**, with whom she corresponded) before going on to become an international foreign correspondent and photojournalist at age 24. "She emerged as the eyes and conscience of the world," says the website for the film biography "Ahead of Time."

Here is a short list of Ruth Gruber's accomplishments; note that the list doesn't even include her many books: The first journalist to enter the Soviet Arctic in 1935, Gruber also traveled to Alaska as a member of the Roosevelt administration in 1942, escorted Holocaust refugees to America in 1944, covered the Nuremberg trials in 1946 and documented the Haganah ship Exodus in 1947. Her relationships with world leaders including **Eleanor Roosevelt**, President **Harry Truman**, and **David Ben Gurion** gave her unique access and insight into the modern history of the Jewish people.

In honor of the 98th birthday of this intrepid photojournalist, friends of hers, who consider themselves Gruber's "surrogate daughters," decided to honor the occasion with a film. The result is "Ahead of Time," which played to mesmerized audiences at the New York Jewish Film Festival in January.

The friends, **Patti Kenner**, president of Campus Coach Lines, and **Doris Schechter**, founder and owner of the Manhattan kosher bakeries, restaurants and catering company My Most Favorite Food, became two of the film's three executive producers. Schechter was only a little girl when Ruth Gruber accompanied her, her family and some 900 other refugees from Nazi Europe on a boat from Italy to Oswego, New York, where they were allowed safe haven. She and Ruth were reunited through mutual friends 25 years ago.

Kenner met Gruber after *Haven*, Gruber's 1983 book on the Oswego experience, came to her attention when she was chairing an event for New York's Museum of Jewish Heritage. Kenner and Schechter also met then, and decided, when they were celebrating Gruber's 97th birthday, that since many films on Ruth Gruber's life had been proposed and never made, they were going to produce a film about Gruber in time for her 98th birthday. In a remarkable feat of filmmaking, their dream team pulled it off, with 200 guests singing "Happy Birthday" to Gruber at the film's opening in Greenwich Village in 2009. The film has since played the Toronto International Film Festival and other venues.

"We couldn't have wanted a better film," says Schechter. Kenner told Lilith, "We will never be able to do the things in our lifetime Ruth did in hers, but what we can do is keep the story of Ruth alive."

For information about the film: *zeva@zevaphoto.com*

JOAN L. ROTH

The Modesty Patrols

For many years, in many cultures, girls' bodies have been constrained and controlled under the guise of "this is ennobling; this helps you achieve the full flower of your womanhood. It's not oppressive; it's freeing!" I don't buy it.... Before we can begin to think about this new agenda for modesty—let's call it *tznius* 2.0—we have to know what it is that we don't want. We don't want the kind of modesty conservative thinkers like **Wendy Shalit** have in mind: long sleeves, long skirts, covered hair for all the married ladies. Those are the same tired, shaming rules. We need to help girls feel at home in their bodies, but in a way that celebrates them instead of hectoring them.

Marjorie Ingall, from "Tznius 2.0," tabletmag, Feb 15, 2010

Next to drugs and arms dealing, human trafficking is the world's most organized, lucrative crime, according to the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime.

"You can only sell drugs or a weapon once," said **Nancy Goldberg**, co-chair of the San Francisco Collaborative Against Human Trafficking and board vice president of the San Francisco-based Jewish Family and Children's Services. "But you can sell a girl or boy 15 to 40 times a night."

Amanda Pazornik, "Stopping human trafficking: Haunted by her past, Jewish woman advocates for other victims," in j. the Jewish news weekly of Northern California, February 18, 2010.

Israel Caves to Misogyny

Two months after medical student **Nofrat Frenkel** (*below*) was arrested at the Western Wall for the apparent crime of Reading Torah While Female, Women of the Wall, the well-known and decades-old organization with whom Frenkel was praying while arrested, faced a new challenge. In early January, **Anat Hoffman**—Women of the Wall's chairwoman, former member of Jerusalem's city council, and director of the Reform Movement's Israel Religious Action Center—was summoned to a local police station for questioning. Hoffman, who did not know the nature of the charges against her, was fingerprinted and questioned upon her arrival, and told she was under investigation for committing a felony. According to a 2003 Israeli Supreme Court ruling, women—specifically Women of the Wall—cannot read Torah in the main plaza of the Wall; they must go to nearby Robinson's Arch. (The ruling reversed a 2002 decision that granted the group full and equal access, which prompted several religious political parties to introduce severely punitive legislation which, had it passed, would have punished women for "non-traditional" prayer at the Western Wall by up to seven years in prison.)

Still facing the possibility of jail time or a large fine, Hoffman is working to turn her plight into an energizing focal point in the fight for religious pluralism within Israel. She told the JTA that she hopes to "wake the American Jewish giant" and has, indeed, already received support from a variety of Jewish groups in the United States, particularly Jewish women's groups and the Reform Movement.

Hoffman, who continues to allege police intimidation, is aiming not only at easing her own legal troubles but at changing the system as it currently exists. Framing her point about religious pluralism in the language of the American civil rights movement, she noted on a recent Reform Movement-sponsored conference call that, "There is simply no such thing as separate but equal."

There is mounting and widespread outrage against the way the Israeli government has handled the harassment of women praying at the Western Wall. Women are meeting—with their tallitot—to hold services and rallies in cities across the U.S. Men are speaking out as well. On a Masorti (Conservative movement) mission to Israel in February, **Bill Lipsey**, a leader of the Agudath Israel Congregation in northern New Jersey, spoke for many on the mission when he announced "If in any country in the world, a Jewish woman was arrested because she tried to carry out the commandments, we would all—all over the United States—protest outside of the embassy. We would not give them a moment's rest. And now here, in the State of Israel, at one of the holiest sites in Israel, at the Western Wall, which is such an important symbol for us all, a Jewish woman was arrested by a Jewish police officer in the Jewish state, just because she tried to carry out the commandment of wrapping herself in a tallit."

M.W.

HOW TWENTY-SOMETHINGS MATE NOW

Three (very Jewish) Rabbis' Daughters, Inhabiting a Multicultural, Radically New World, Dish Seriously About Their Non-Jewish Partnering.

by SUSAN SCHNUR

IT HAS RECENTLY OCCURRED TO ME THAT "NORMATIVE" Jewish-American experience lasts exactly one generation. What I mean by that is that my Jewish experience—which I thought would stay, somehow, the ongoing Jewish-American one, certainly the one shared by my children—turns out to have been specific to coming-of-age in New Jersey and New York in the 1960s and '70s. In that world, Jews were largely Jewishly literate—they'd gone to Hebrew school, had immigrant grandparents (or sometimes parents), their families belonged to synagogues. It never occurred to us that Yiddish accents had a lifespan, or that fealty to Israel might one day become complicated.

If I were less narcissistic, I might have noticed, indeed, that my parents' Jewish young-adulthood was very different from mine. They and their siblings all, for example, married first-generation American Jews from Trenton, New Jersey—*how shtetl is that?*—and WWII and the Holocaust breathed down on them in a way that was not true for me. My 91-year-old mother confirms (I just checked in with her) that her children's experience, thirty years on, seemed to her worlds apart. Having recently strained to wrap my head around my own twentysomething kids' Jewish *Zeitgeist*, I look back at my nuptial experience of the 1970s—marrying the Jewish son of two Eastern European immigrants, which felt to me at the time like an act of free will—as quaint and overdetermined, a sepia Jewish Hallmark card. *Who knew?* Time marches on, and what feels, perhaps, assimilative and de-Judaizing to one generation, feels normative to the next.

AND SO I SAT DOWN WITH MY DAUGHTER AND TWO OF HER strongly Jewishly-identified twentysomething acquaintances—three rabbis' kids—and asked them about their felt world, its progressive *Zeitgeist*, their intellectual socialization—and how all of this has inflected their interpersonal choices. All three of these young women—Sophie, Tali and Abby*—are deeply engaged in Judaism, religiously, affectively, intellectually and culturally, and they chose to attend colleges with substantial Jewish populations, where they each assumed various positions of Jewish leadership. (Tali is currently in college; Sophie's about to graduate; Abby finished a year ago.) They also chose to attend colleges with very liberal values, and, as feminists, they were not looking for universities with Orthodox populations. ("Orthodoxy is totally not an option for me," is how Tali put it.) What I wanted to get a bead on mostly, though, to be honest, was something that struck me as a radically shifted generational experience, the fact that ***all three of my informants, despite trenchant Jewish identities, are currently in, and/or have recently been in, long-term romantic relationships with non-Jews—and they are also consonant with the idea of someday marrying partners who are not Jewish.***

I first asked the young women how they thought their Jewish campus experience would feel most foreign to me. Well, they said, **first**, I'd be surprised by how **few Jewish students have two Jewish parents**. **Second**, I'd be surprised by **the extremely high level of Jewish illiteracy** among Jews.

"Thinking Chanukah has 12 days, not knowing the difference between the words 'kiddish' and 'kaddish'—this isn't unusual," Abby said. She described its "being hard to find other Jewish kids to feel Jewish with. Like you lead a Seder for other campus Jews and it feels really empty, like you're 'performing

*All names have been changed to protect the innocent, guilty and ambivalent.

your ethnicity.'" Tali and Sophie concurred. Tali added, "Even in the context of Jewish summer programs, I've experienced such a huge gap between me and the other Jews in terms of practice and knowledge. Since high school, even when I'm with Jews who've opted in as Jews, I'm so often the 'resident Jew.'"

Third, they said I'd be surprised to find that **it's largely seen as racist (or otherwise discriminatory) for a Jew to want to date or marry only other Jews**. "To say that I'd limit who I date, that I'd automatically rule someone out because they're not Jewish—that's offensive to people," Sophie said. "It's outdated. Jews are seen as white and privileged, and liberal university campuses celebrate diversity and pluralism." Abby said, "Dating non-Jews is seen as positive, it gives you legitimacy, it proves something about you, that you're open to other people and cultures. My girlfriend, who is half-white/Christian and half-Indian/Hindu, used to say, after I started dating her, that I had more cred now."

"My Hindu-Indian girlfriend used to say, after we started dating, 'You have more cred now. At college, a jew dating a non-Jew is seen as positive... it proves you're open to other people + cultures."

Fourth, the young women said that I'd find that **the binary Jewish/Christian world—which classically defined 'us' as Jews and 'them' as Christians—no longer exists**. "Binary is dead," Sophie reported—no more sacred non-meeting twains. There are Buddhist, Muslim and religiously non-identifying students on campus; there are those who define their faith not heritably but through choice; there are many international students; there are gay, bisexual, queer and straight students. In other words, "there are multiple dimensions upon which I might experience a person as 'us' or 'them,' 'same' or 'other,'" said Abby. "Another Jew might feel 'other' to me. Another minority person might feel 'same.' Or someone might feel, depending on the social criteria, very 'same' on certain levels and very 'other' on others."

The young women attributed feelings of "sameness" to a range of experiences and identities: "Anyone at college who identifies as religious, even if their religion is different." "Someone of a different minority culture who's really committed to that, intellectually and emotionally." "If you have a complex understanding of sexuality." "If you've converted and you care about being Jewish, that's 'same,' but if you're nicely acquiescing and going through the motions for me, that's 'other.'" "Israel is a big part of my identity, as is Hebrew—that feels 'same.'" "Liberals—a no-brainer."

As for "other": "The idea of a God-given Torah feels 'other' to me." "Orthodox experience in which women are specta-

PAINTINGS: MOLLY MULLAHY

tors." "Anyone not living with white privilege, or living with food insecurity, or truly living in poverty—they're 'other,' but I don't like to confront this." "As someone working with the poor, they don't feel 'other' to me, they feel 'same,' but I acknowledge our differences." "Jews who don't identify as Jews." "Homophobes."

And it gets complicated and paradoxical. "With Jews on campus, I couldn't *davven* with my full voice—because I was one of the only voices—and they weren't a group that I could talk through my spiritual practices and decisions with. So I joined the gospel choir and moved into a Buddhist campus community, and that works," said Tali. Likewise Abby remembered a semester off-campus. "Living on the Lakota reservation in North Dakota was one of the most Jewish times I ever felt. People would say, 'She's Jewish the way we're Indian.'"

"Then he said his family did this Sunday afternoon sort of Christian-Bible-study-ethical-education-sing-a-few-songs thing, with a few other families, and I was like, 'Oh, a Chavurah! Great!"

People having **hybrid identities** was the **fifth** way the young women thought their campus experience would feel different to me. Post-colonial, post-modern hybridity—living *between* cultures—is an ascendant cultural value. To paraphrase Zadie Smith, "Each woman must be true to her selves—plural." One's identity is *expected* to be complex and multiple. "You may not be multiracial or multicultural yourself, but your coupling often is," said Sophie. If you're an Ashkenazi Jew dating another Ashkenazi Jew, in other words, that can seem almost redundant and unimaginative. It can also seem as though you're purveying a triumphal white culture. "Being American-born, English-speaking, middle-class, white. There's some guilt about that," Sophie said. "I feel less entitled to care about this group since we're not struggling."

Related to this—**number six**—is **a somewhat vanished sense of being Jewish as a minority experience**. As my informants talked about the various males and females they've dated, I realized how dynamic it can feel to reach outside of one's Jewish self to regain, paradoxically, that insurgent sense of Jewish outsiderliness.

Tali and Abby would be considered, by most accounts, religious. They are Sabbath observers (in a self-made but consistent fashion); one is a daily *davvener*, the other a weekly *davvener*; they keep *kashrut*. Sophie is observant to a lesser extent. "**Religion is just bad—that's its reputation at liberal colleges**," Tali said. (**Number seven.**) "The fact that I identify as a religious person makes me feel very 'other' at my university. I'm not someone who rejected religion, and I'm also not someone who just discovered it."

"At all our colleges, religion is like a dirty word," Sophie said. "It's considered old-fashioned and close-minded," Tali added, "and it causes wars. Religion causes wars." Abby: "It's superstitious." Tali: "It's irrational and it makes people be hateful." Sophie: "Or misogynist." Hey, the jury was in.

The idea of dating another Jew just because they're Jewish is antiquated—that's the **eighth** big difference. "It's totally irrelevant to me whether you're Jewish if you don't identify as Jewish," Tali said. "I would gain from dating a Jew if he had knowledge, identity and the desire to practice, otherwise dating an unidentified Jew and a non-Jew are pretty much in the same category to me. And Jews who once identified but now hate it, that's not going to work out for me."

The idea that being Jewish means de facto sharing a *sensibility*, at least while one's life is lived on a liberal college campus, has little currency. To feel that one shares a sensibility—religious or cultural—one might do better looking to non-Jews. "There are so few Jewishly-identified Jews you have to mix and match," said Tali. "Having some other culture feels right." These young women are not looking to share content, as I did, in my twenties, with my

boyfriends and then husband—meaning that we celebrated the same holidays, history and vernacular language—but sensibility.

"I have a friend who jokes about the 'Church of Oberlin,'" Abby said. "It's a 'belief' in environmentalism, feminism, liberal politics, abortion rights, gun control and being green. These are my values." As it turned out, her campus Hillel "didn't have my values." Spirituality is sometimes a value, too—the idea of connecting with something larger than oneself—but this isn't religious, it's *trans*-religion.

Perhaps the most radical idea to me is **number nine**: the idea that **a strongly identified Jew can be compleat unto herself**—she doesn't need a Jewish partner. "I assume I'll have a partner who is willing to say *kiddish* with me," said Sophie, "but that partner doesn't have to be Jewish."

"When I travel in Asia or South America and I'm the only Jew, it's okay," said Tali. "I mark space by *davvening* and through keeping Shabbat, and that's home. No matter where I am." Abby agreed, adding, "Being very Jewish is somewhat internal. It's very disconnected from dating or marriage." Part of this "identity construction" goes back to the way these three young women were raised.

"My parents were very clear that until my bat mitzvah they dictated the practice for the family, and after that you dictate your personal practice insofar as it doesn't conflict with theirs in the house," said Tali. "If you want to drive somewhere on Shabbat, that's up to you, but don't use the house phone. Just basic respect, but autonomy. They made their choices and I'm going to make mine."

"My mother modeled giving me access to a wide range of Jewish things," said Sophie, "like I went to an Orthodox Day School. She shot some of these things down, and then basically gave me license to pick and choose." She added, "It's a comfort to me."

(Another twentysomething Jewish woman with whom I spoke—who has, as she put it, a partner who's "ethnically and religiously ambiguous" who "hates organized religion," told me: "I go to synagogue and to Jewish events as a functional single. I look and smell like a single person in the Jewish world, and *I* make what's Jewish in our household. My non-Jewish partner knows a lot about religion, she appreciates its power, she gives me a lot of space. I also don't have to share decision-making," she added, "and I kind of like that." My informants agreed that a Jewish partner sometimes meant "a whole lot of icky dialogue and compromise.")

On campus, **authenticity is also a value**. (**Ten**). "If you're not going through a process, your identity isn't authentic," explained Tali. "It's more authentic if you work it out for yourself."

Finally, (**eleventh**), **these young women**, though conventionally religious Jews in most ways, **aren't looking for Judaism to prescribe what they should do**. They're not looking to take on a Judaism "that's a whole extrinsic system," as Abby put it, with obligations, dogma, theology, halacha and rules. "A shul, a rabbi, those don't seem so important," Sophie said. "We are the text, the text comes from within."

AND SO, WITH THIS INTRODUCTION, I ASKED Sophie, Tali and Abby to walk me, separately, through each of their dating histories—their boyfriends, and girlfriends, from the time they left Jewish day schools (which they all attended) to the present. For Tali, that was after high school; for Sophie and Abby, that was from ninth grade on. Who they dated, how they made sense of it, what worked and didn't work, and what they imagine for themselves in the years ahead.

After listening to these three, I offer some concluding thoughts on page 45.

Sophie's Dating History

"MY FIRST BOYFRIEND, TUC, WASN'T JEWISH, but no one at my high school was; it was an urban, public magnet school in Boston, a city we had just moved to. Tuc was Vietnamese, an immigrant. I tend to feel sameness with Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants, and kids of immigrants. It's a kind of identification with traditional cultures, pre-modern cultures. I learned Yiddish as a teenager. I loved his mother, who spoke no English—I think that was part of what I loved. Tuc was part of my "group" at high school; I kind of identified as Asian by default, because I didn't really identify with the white kids. Being with Tuc seemed kind of endogamous. The white kids, they were so much taller than me, I really felt they wouldn't notice me as a romantic object, and they did sports and lived in different neighborhoods.

"Tuc and I were very interested in where the other was coming from, we talked about Jewish and Vietnamese-Buddhist stuff a lot. I felt it was his prerogative, though, not mine, to say we were 'similar,' because I came from a privileged place, socio-economically and racially. I'd say, 'In your culture, who gets the best cut of meat, the kids or your father?' I'd say, 'Take me to your temple.' He loved spending *shabbos* at my house. But there was a part of me that was a little wary. Did we really know each other? Was this relationship really viable, or did our exotic differences actually obscure who the other person was and whether we were honestly compatible? We always have salads with dinner at my house and I remember him saying, 'Jews eat salad.' We were together for two years. That's a really long time in high school.

"Freshman year at college I had my first girlfriend, and it didn't feel

like a problem to me that she wasn't Jewish because we shared being queer. Heterosexual couples don't 'share' heterosexuality in this way. There was a class distinction between Tammy and me—she was working-class—that felt familiar to me, it was like the kids from my high school. But her background felt like a big disconnect for her on our [Ivy League] campus. She didn't personally identify with an ethnic-cultural heritage, and that started to feel very 'other' to me. We broke up after about a year. I wouldn't go back to a relationship like that again.

"My next girlfriend, junior year, was the first Jewish person I ever dated, and it was funny because her father was one of these totally uncommitted Israelis. Her mom was a nice Jew from Long Island, so it was a mixed marriage. I was very aware of Mimi being the first Jew I'd ever been with, and it was nice in a way—it was one less thing to think about, I knew her milieu. I knew exactly what her parents were going to be like; I knew what her home shul was probably like, her parents' apartment in Manhattan, their friends. Her family was really different from ours in several ways, but we started with a basic frame of reference, with being able to anticipate things instead of the relationship being a completely blank slate.

"We met through both being in the college's klezmer band, though there are, of course, non-Jews in our band, so that wasn't determinative. With Mimi, there was an ease factor—being able to go to High Holiday services together and have it not be a whole fucking production. On the other hand, when it is a whole fucking production—*should she come, will she be offended, will she be disappointed, do I want her there, how would I explain things to her*—that can be awesome. There's a developmental piece, I'm sure, when you're involved with someone non-Jewish. It helps you clarify what matters to you about your Jewish identity.

"After Mimi, there were a couple of Jewish women at school who were interested in me, I think, because they thought it was awesome that I had the traditional-

observant-Judaism thing. And I was queer. I remember thinking, 'Wow, you wouldn't think I was so cool unless you were like, Whoa, here's someone who's pulling off the Jewish queer thing.' I didn't get into romantic relationships with them, though.

"Senior year I had a relationship with Mira, a southern Indian girl raised in America from the age of six, and we held back from exploring each other's exoticism, which I liked—but of course we were aware that our early childhoods took place half-way around the world from each other's. At one point she asked me, 'Would you like me if I wasn't Indian?' And then she was like, "Well, what would I even be, is there even a me, without being Indian?' That presented a kind of wonderful confusion.

"Looking ahead, I could imagine being with a non-Jew very long-term *if* they're from a different minority culture and really committed to that. I wouldn't have to explain my intellectual or emotional Jewish commitment, the not-completely-rational-religious component. Of course, there's also this question of whether I end up with a man or a woman. With the latter, there's this whole 'intersectionality' thing, as they say in ethnic studies—that two different minority identities aren't just additive, they really transform each other. So if I'm in a lesbian community, would I be less likely to be part of a Jewish community because my kids will have this other form of support? Or maybe a queer community would put me geographically in a place where I'd be more likely to have access to a strong Jewish community as well.

"But if I'm with a guy, well, I won't have to live in New York or Boston or Berkeley, and I could move near my brother, who's an organic farmer, but then my kids won't go to Jewish day school, blah blah blah. And then there's trying to meet a queer, strongly-identified Jewish person—which might be *extremely* hard.

"Lately I've been thinking that my partner's group-identity isn't that important, that my work is to determine my own relationship to my own Judaism—the rest will be commentary. I'm a deeply identified Jew, but I live in this multicultural place—how can I expect myself to live there without falling in love with the other people who live there, too? What I assume is that *I'm* going to transmit Jewish stuff to my kids, and my partner, whether Jewish or not, is going to be a part of that, because I don't want to do it single-handedly."

Tali's Dating History

"MY FIRST FALLING-IN-LOVE, REALLY serious relationship was with an Israeli man, the year between high school and college, during a year of global studies based in Israel. We shared a common 'language' and knowledge-base and sensibility about time and space that's Jewish—the lifecycle, the *haggim* [holidays], the history—but he knew all this without its being something he had taken on personally, and he had chosen *not* to take it on personally. He had rejected religious Judaism, he was totally secular. So we had all the 'things' we needed—the framework to talk about these things and we *could* talk about them—but he still wasn't the same kind of Jew I was at all. It was totally inter-cultural, which I sometimes would forget—because, after all, we were two Jews in Israel.

"But I loved showing him my spirituality, and when he did *kiddush* I loved him, and he really liked how much my spirituality challenged him. But he had reject-

ed Orthodoxy, not progressive, feminist Judaism, and I had rejected that, too—but I was still religious. So I was introducing this whole new language to him.

"The relationship was doomed, though, because we were both starting school in different countries for the next four years. The Jewish piece didn't ultimately feel like a conflict, but the American/Israeli thing *was* a conflict. And my family was not very excited about me falling in love with an Israeli—it triggered a lot of…fear…of losing me to this other place. And, like, Israeli *men* are not Nice Jewish *Boys*. But I did picture our future—I was in love with him in that way—and it was a Jewish house, an Israeli house, we spoke Hebrew to our kids, our kids spoke Hebrew. It was great to think about how that household would be Jewish, even though I would be the only one supplying the spirituality.

"And he was a kibbutznik, so he was the *real deal*. A huge part of my Jewish identity is growing up in a socialist Jewish camp that was affiliated with Habonim Dror.

"And then I started college and suddenly, for the first time, I met so many Jews who were not Jewishly identified. There were literally only a handful of guys on a level of Jewish practice and commitment that would make it meaningful to me that they were Jewish. So, okay, I'm thinking, *Do I want to be single for four years, or try to work it with a woman because she's Jewish, or what?* I'd known I was open to dating non-Jews, and here I was.

"Then I met Tristan—it was sophomore year; we're still together, it's been a year and a half—and he asked me to go to this show as a second date, and I couldn't go because I was leading High Holidays services on campus. And he came to *Kol Nidre*! Which was such a statement, you know. He knew instinctively not to make eye contact—because it wasn't about me and it wasn't about him, and he got that. He was totally interested in the *machzor* the whole time, reading it, and I was like, '*Oookay*….' So he saw me lead *Kol Nidre* with a tallit over my head and everything.

"We coined this word - ARMADILLO - which means, 'Oh NO, we're in this FORWARD-thinking, pressure CONVERSATION, and we don't want to be here, so we're stopping. INTER-couples get into ARMADILLOS: INTER-RACIAL, INTER-CLASS, INTER-CULTURAL.'"

"He had already told me he wasn't religious, but I was like, 'I hope he doesn't *hate* religion,' because so many people do at college and that would be such a big blockade. But he said that when he was a kid his family did a Sunday-afternoon-sort-of-Christian-Bible-study-ethical-education-sing-a-few-songs sort of thing—it was lay-led, a few families. And in my head I was like, 'Oh, *chavurah*—great!' So he knew that the religion that causes wars can be distinct from something intimate and beautiful. And I was like, 'Okay, I can work with that.' And because he wasn't Jewish he was open to whatever I wanted to share with him about Judaism.

"So…after a year, I was like—I had a few drinks, I couldn't say this otherwise—'I, umm, also, don't know, umm, if I need to make a family with someone's who's Jewish, I don't know that.' He was like, 'I know!' Everything I said, he was like, 'I know.' But our relationship had transitioned to a "we really love each other" kind of thing, so this was a little painful.

"And then summer was coming, and I was in a leadership position at my Jewish camp, and—this was insane!—I hired him to be the nature-teacher guy; he was, like, the only non-Jew at the camp. It was totally irrelevant to staff that I had a non-Jewish boyfriend; no one brought up the issue once all summer. It was intense, though, so he felt this really big need to say, 'I'm not Jewish! I'm not here to get changed!' but at the same time, he was like, 'This is super fun! And look, I learned these prayers, ha ha ha.' But he did make it clear to me at that point that he doesn't identify as a religious person…and that's hard for me.

"Where we are now, Tristan and I, I want him to *like* Judaism. If he doesn't like it, it's like not liking a part of me, and that hurts. He thinks a lot of *halakhic* observance is stupid, and we definitely have different ideas about Israel. He's like, 'You guys just don't confront some of the actual challenges about Israel,' and I'm like, '*Well…it's hard.*'

[continued on page 44]

WHO AM I?

A teenage African-American Jewish adoptee probes her roots

The new documentary film "Off and Running" bills itself as "An American Coming of Age Story," which it is. It also happens to be an adoptee's coming-of-age story, a black coming-of-age story, a Jewish coming-of-age story, an interracial family's coming-of-age story. But for director and producer Nicole Opper, the 29-year-old filmmaker who brings the story of Brooklyn teen Avery Klein-Cloud and her family to the screen, this is most importantly Avery's coming-of-age story. With two Jewish lesbian moms and two brothers (also transracially adopted), Avery grew up in a loving home, attended Hebrew day school where for several years she was the only Jew of color in her class, and, as the film begins, is a track star (hence the film's title) at an all-black public high school in Brooklyn. The film—for which Opper and Klein-Cloud share writing credit—follows Avery's decision to contact her birth mother, and her often painful, if ultimately inspiring, path of self-discovery and self-definition. (The pair won the WGA Silverdocs Documentary Screenplay Award; the film will be aired on the PBS series POV this fall.) Opper talked with editors Susan Weidman Schneider and Melanie Weiss about how "Off and Running" grew out of her interest in what constitutes family, and about what it can mean to be an activist filmmaker who provokes tough questions from the audience.

Lilith: You've said that when you started to make this film you identified with the moms, but there really are divergent emotional paths being followed in the film.

Nicole Opper: The two mothers are supporting characters in the film. Avery is definitely the primary force that we're dealing with. But that was actually a challenge for me—I went into the film seeing myself in Avery's family. I'm gay and I knew I'd probably adopt transracially. But I had always been there to tell the story from Avery's point of view. So it was a matter of stepping outside of my own perspective, to the degree that that's possible, and understanding how Avery was feeling in each moment.

There was obviously something special about Avery, even from the time that she was quite young—some excitement about her.

I first met Avery when I was making a documentary about Hannah Senesh, "Song of Hannah," distributed by the National Center for Jewish Film, because I'd approached the Hannah Senesh Day School in Brooklyn, and involved them in the storytelling.

I always describe Avery as charismatic. She enters a room and just lights it up—she was just that kind of kid. And that's why there was such a heavy contrast when she became a teenager—which is not at all uncommon for teenagers of all backgrounds—but in her case, it was just a very complex identity crisis she was going through. And even though I met her when she was really a kid, and ultimately I became her teacher, I just always had a sense that she's so fun to watch, she's so fun to listen to—she's just really compelling. It didn't occur to me to make a film about her until she was 16, but I did already have the sense that she was someone who could really anchor a feature film—which is not easy to do.

Avery's story seems to open up conversations about a lot of material that doesn't make it into public consciousness—or private consciousness, for that matter. In the film Avery says some very frank things, like that she doesn't really know what it is to feel black, that she begins to identify with that part of herself, and it seems she feels her mothers don't really fit into that part of her life.

That's been fascinating for me to hear, the private side. Conversations that you imagine are taking place around the din-

Rafi, Avery and younger brother Zay-Zay

ner tables of interracial families often aren't, and that's what a lot of young people are coming to the film and saying in the Q&A sessions. They're able to use the film as a catalyst for some of those conversations, which was really ideal for us—it was part of the goal of the project. You don't see a lot of the conflict [between Avery and her mothers] directly on the screen. The conflicts were never about race directly, but about things like who does the chores.

Did people assume that there was some edge of hostility or defensiveness when one of Avery's adoptive mothers, Tova, hears Avery say she wants to find out who she is, and replies, "I'll tell you who you are—you're my child."

Adoptees respond really strongly to that, and adoptive parents do too, actually. [One adoptive dad] came up to me and said, "God, that just drove me crazy, it was so painful for me to watch how Tova responded." And I was really taken aback, because I had always read that line as her really trying to be the protective mama. Just trying to make sure Avery knew "I'm here for you, you do have an identity, I'm not going anywhere. I'm your mom." And here was this adoptive father saying that he saw it as her not giving Avery the space to be who she was, she was trying to construct it for her, and as adoptive parents we just can't do that. There's seems to be an impulse to pass judgment on the parents in this film—and to pass judgment on Avery, too—which I can't stop, but as a filmmaker, I never pass judgment on them.

That's part of why that scene is so powerful—it's got that built-in ambiguity.

Exactly! It's interesting, there have been reviewers who've pointed out quotes like this—one that got a lot of attention was when Tova says, "You take after me." Sure, it's maybe a little bit interesting or provocative—"Oh, she's suggesting Avery takes after her, but they're not biologically related"—but I think that needs to be problematized. This girl was adopted at birth; of course she's going to take after these people who nurtured her and raised her and created her whole environment.

And then there's the comment that comes up all the time [at screenings]: "Why can't Avery just be grateful for all she's been given?"—by parents who think of themselves as rescuers. We're seeing this now regarding adoptions from Haiti.

You've said that Avery and her almost-same-age adopted brother Rafi, who leaves for Princeton as Avery begins her senior year of high school, had very different fantasies about finding their birth families.

I think Avery's fantasies about her birth family have changed a lot over time. Right now, she's much more concerned about her birth siblings—meeting them or just having them acknowledge her existence, since she's not sure if they know about her—and we'll see if the film makes it to their television sets, and how we'll deal with that in the future. But I do think she imagined herself going down to Texas and opening the door and seeing how it would go. I don't ever think she saw herself adopting a new family, but she was interested in getting to know everyone. They share a lot in common--all of her birth siblings are athletes, and she looks a lot like her birth mom, whose picture she's seen. I'm sure she had a lot of fantasies about meeting her birth family.

Actually, Avery and Rafi fit into this interesting sociological pattern. We know that girls search for their birth parents—usually just their birth moms—at far younger ages than boys do. There are exceptions, of course, but by and large girls start searching around Avery's age, sometimes even younger, and boys generally don't until they grow up and start families of their own.

Why is that? Do you think it's because girls themselves are capable of giving birth and so they're especially yearning to

understand the history or the process of their birth mothers' life stories and the decision to relinquish a child for adoption? Avery suggests this connection just a little when, after she has an abortion, she says in the film "I would never want to put up a baby for adoption."

There's a lot of speculation about that, but I think the reasons are all across the board. I think oftentimes it's really just about emotional development, and that happening later for males. In Rafi's case, he wanted to be in control all the time, and he didn't want to do anything that would jeopardize that control—which might also be a male thing.

It's striking to see Avery back at the reunion of her Hebrew day school, seeing Hebrew lettering on the walls, seeing the labels on the drawers in the family's kitchen marked in Hebrew for dairy cutlery, watching the archival footage of Jewish holiday celebrations. When you speak at screenings of "Off and Running," do a lot of people ask about the Jewish piece of it?

We also work with Bechol Lashon (an organization dedicated to building "a Judaism that transcends differences in geography, ethnicity, class, race, ritual practice, and beliefs") and the Jewish Multiracial Network, and the Foundation for Jewish Culture. And the UJA Federation women's group has just embraced the film, which is great....The film is a catalyst to begin the discussion in interracial families. Avery, in the film, really celebrates her Judaism and really connects to being Jewish. Her struggle comes from outsiders looking in, feeling as though how could she possibly be Jewish and questioning her authenticity as a Jew. She says, "When people first meet me they don't see me as being Jewish." But she herself has always felt strongly connected to the community, because she was raised to be a part of it—she attended a Jewish day school until the 8th grade, went to shul every week.

There's an inside and an outside feeling. Someone has said that "To adopt is to adapt." Avery is in a constant state of adaptation—like all teenagers.

The film follows Avery as she leaves the home in which she's been raised, leaves her mothers and her brothers, and for five months stays with various friends, missing school, having limited contact with her former happy household. You were obviously in Avery's confidence while all this was going on. You knew where she was, it seems, even when her family didn't.

How did I know when to be the filmmaker and the teacher and the friend? I really was always tottering between those roles, and I knew that there were times when they were in conflict with one another. And I just always made a choice that mentor came first.

Was there always an activist track to what you have been doing as a filmmaker?

To tell the truth—I love the idea of you thinking of me as an activist, but I'm not necessarily drawn to a lot of the work that feels very didactic and agenda-driven. And sometimes that worked against me with this film, because gay and lesbian people wanted to see, you know, perfect parents, and to see a positive portrayal of themselves in the media. And the same goes for all sorts of minority groups that are represented in this film. It was a struggle to negotiate and balance that when what I was committed to doing was following the story as truthfully as possible. I'm thrilled that a lot of adoption groups feel that they can use this film as an education piece. But I'm still figuring out my identity as a filmmaker, and I'm not sure I would call myself an activist filmmaker.

I really believe that there's a mandate, once you make a film that has the ability to create change, to continue the work, and get it into the schools and make sure the curricula are built, because it's really not something that anyone else is going to necessarily be interested in championing. It's really the filmmaker's responsibility, for better or for worse.

Avery's struggle comes from outsiders looking in, thinking how could she possibly be Jewish.

PHOTOS FROM "OFF AND RUNNING"

Avery addresses the issue of her vulnerability [in being the subject of this film]. She really recognizes it, and she's very clear: "This was scary, but I went into it with all my eyes open."
I think the take-away for me was, yes, she made herself really vulnerable and yes, it was very brave of her to do this, but it was her choice and she was in control. At any point, she could have asked for something to be removed from the film, and we talked regularly about what would be included and what would be left on the cutting room floor.

Were there episodes that Avery chose to cut?
Interestingly, there really weren't. There were a few scenes that got reworked based on conversations that we had—like the scene between Avery and the therapist towards the end of the film. We'd cut it a certain way, and Avery said well, this part feels exactly like what happened, but this part doesn't feel right, because I didn't get to answer her the way I wanted to. Things like that; we were able to massage the material until it felt, to her, like it was really representing her experience. That was always at the core of everything.

What's happening with Avery now?
I just spent the weekend with her—she came down for the [commercial] opening. She just turned 20, and she's busy running track. She's on a scholarship at Delaware State University, and she's living the college life—partying, studying, and establishing her independence, and she's having a really great time there.

And her moms are still very much her moms?
Absolutely. They've been getting along really well. She stays with them every time she's in New York, and in fact, for her boyfriend, Prince—his parents moved to Philadelphia and he needed a place to stay in New York to finish high school; he's younger—her moms offered to open up their house to him, and he's living there. So it's… one big happy family!

It may sound crazy when you're still enjoying the success of this film, but what's next?
I'm actually headed to Mexico, to make a documentary film about three teenage boys growing up in a home for abandoned children in Puebla. It's a really special home that's self-sustainable—the boys all work on this goat farm and make goat cheese and sell it around the country to cover their cost of living, but they're also being educated on-site, and most of them age out and go on to college. It's a real success story, especially since they've almost all been living on the street for some time before they're picked up by social service agencies and brought to this home. It hasn't really been replicated, and I'm interested in why… The way I'm perceiving it, and framing it, the film is also about what an alternative family can look like, since these are boys who become brothers, not by blood but by coming together and growing up in this space.

I'm interested in exploring the complications of family, the whole notion of what it even means to be a family, and how they get formed, especially when it's across race and culture. That's really what interests me. ■

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MULTICULTURAL JEWISH RESOURCES:

Jewish Multiracial Network
jewishmultiracialnetwork.org

Ayecha
Provides support, information and resources for Jews of Color.
www.ayecha.org

Be'chol Lashon
www.bechollashon.org

Kulanu
www.kulanu.org

Tapestry
www.tapestry-online.com

Foundation for Jewish Culture
www.jewishculture.org

JEWISH ADOPTION RESOURCES:

Jewish Child Care Association
http://www.jccany.org
For more information on the Ametz Adoption Program, run by the JCCA, write to *ametz@jccany.org*

The Association of Jewish Family and Children's Agencies
http://www.ajfca.org

Jewish Children's Adoption Network
http://www.milechai.com/jewishadoption.html

Stars of David
www.starsofdavid.org

LGBT PARENTING ORGANIZATIONS:

COLAGE (for the children of LGBT parents)
www.colage.org

Gay Parent Magazine
http://www.gayparentmag.com

Proud Parenting
http://www.proudparenting.com

For more information on "Off and Running," go to *www.offandrunningthefilm.org*. You can schedule a screening by emailing Paul Marchant at *paul@firstrunfeatures.com*.

In London, the Wedding Space RESHAPES Her Whole Experience

by JUDY BATALION

"MARRIAGE IS A WONDERFUL INSTITUTION. BUT WHO WANTS TO LIVE IN AN INSTITUTION?" GROUCHO MARX FAMOUSLY ASKED.

I—an art historian and a comedian—am a particular type of Jewish woman: early 30s, hyper-educated, feminist and secular. I was schooled at an egalitarian anti-religious Yiddishist establishment; I grew up on a diet of Judys (Blume, Chicago, Plaskow, Butler, Hauptman); I have spent much more time in museums (and, admittedly, malls) than in shuls; and my life fantasies have mainly involved publishing best-sellers or performing to sold-out stadiums.

I never thought I'd get married. A partner, maybe, but marriage? Barely even on my radar. So when love and life took me in an unexpected direction, and last year I found myself planning a Jewish wedding (that's right—for me) I was surprised on many levels. I was surprised when the florist asked about my dream color scheme (huh?); I was surprised to be telling people to save the date for my wedding; I was surprised that I was going to be married at a strict Orthodox Sephardic British synagogue which insisted on maintaining the same gendered rituals as when the synagogue first opened in 1701. Most of all, I was surprised that I didn't mind any of this. That much.

Why would a North American Ashkenazi secularist be getting married at said synagogue? Well, I was living in London at the time, my parents had made their only request that it be an Orthodox service ("Generations of our family have been married in Orthodox weddings."). And I had heard stories about couples with non-Orthodox *ketubahs* whose children (children? was I going to do that too?) couldn't go to certain schools—but really these were all just rationalizations. I wanted to get married at London's Bevis Marks synagogue because, frankly, it's beautiful.

I spent many years living nearby in East London by myself with barely a Jewish friend, and when I walked in there on Yom Kippur I may not have recognized the tunes, but I didn't need a ticket; I may not have known the prayers, but I was awed by the real-candle-filled candelabra and the Queen Anne benches. This was the oldest synagogue I had ever attended and actually "used," and it struck me as an awesome place. My husband also liked the synagogue, and so, driven by my aesthetic passion, after endlessly proving that our parents had had Orthodox weddings ("We need to confirm with their rabbi," we were told, never mind that he's been dead 30 years), and working against the clock and the Omer, we were accepted for marriage in this historical gem.

But with history, as I came to learn, came historical positions for women. The 1701 bride may have been illuminated by several elaborate candlesticks, but she was also required to wait in the basement while her betrothed signed the ketubah—the marriage contract—presided over by her father. (As it was a Sephardic synagogue, the bride didn't circle the husband seven times, but she did have to cover her back and arms.) When I first heard that I would have to hover in the basement for a quarter of my wedding service, and that I would not give a ring, say a prayer, or speak, I was appalled. This certainly ran counter to my Jewish, feminist, performing background and beliefs. I was afraid to discuss this dissonance with any of my friends, since I'd already gotten flack for getting married at all. (Background: Britain is staunchly secular, and religious celebrations are seen as particularly reactionary; most of my Jewish friends thought the ketubah was a subjectivity-death-sentence, and the *mikvah* a physical exercise in self-abnegation.) I was faced with a conflict: how could I reconcile my aesthetic and historical sensibilities with my womanhood? And could I actually go through with this?

The Orthodox synagogues in England (where, by the way, you can be legally married only in officially recognized sites, and different sites are recognized for different religions) require that, to be married in them, you need to attend marriage classes. I did not particularly want to spend my Tuesday evenings with a rabbi telling me how to be a good Jewish wife, nor extra classes

with a rabbi's wife about abstaining from sex for half the month, while the whole time pretending that I was an 18-year-old virgin. This was not what I had wanted, and—despite the fact that non-refundable deposits had been paid, invitations had been sent, and the big date was approaching—I was veering more and more toward thinking that this Orthodox ceremony decision was a major mistake.

Reluctantly, heavy with skepticism, I went along to the classes. And this is where my preconceptions began to break down. These classes were frank talks about [*Drumroll*] sex and money, about bodies, houses, and the benefits to having shared and/or individual bank accounts. Some teachers were more didactic than others, but by and large these were Talmudic-style discussions about the issues of married life, where we all shared and debated opinions. What surprised me more was discovering that elements of relationships—honesty, trust, sexual attraction, foreplay—were not invented in 1980s self-help books, but were debated throughout millennia of rabbinic literature. I had used "Sex and the City" to guide me through dating etiquette (what else could?). Now I could use elements of the Talmud to guide me through turning my husband on, and on an even more taboo matter: talking about money. These classes and Judaism provided a structure not just for relating, but for talking about relating. Our marriage was not just an emotional union, but an institution that was beyond us as a couple, and part of a greater history, and here was a framework we could draw on to make decisions and work through difficult issues.

The 1701 bride may have been illuminated by several elaborate candlesticks, but she was also required to wait in the basement while her betrothed signed the ketubah.

I was also presented with more complicated perspectives than the myths of my particular cultural milieu. The ketubah was indeed signed only by the man, but was also his guarantee to protect and provide for the woman, financially and sexually. The mikvah practice placed the Jewish woman's body at the center of the entire family's dynamic, and also gave women an excuse to indulge themselves and get in touch with their own bodies every month. Not all of the ideas flew with me (I couldn't envision myself using the tissues I was given to send samples of my menstrual blood to a specially trained rabbi each month so he could OK my status), but my eyes were opened to different interpretations of Jewish law about sexuality and the family. (And none of the rabbis even pretended that I was a virgin.)

I realized that getting married at the shul didn't bother me. Gender is not clear cut, dynamics and intimacy are hugely complex, and my own relationship is so not "classically gendered" (my husband was more into the wedding planning than I was; he actually did have fantasy color schemes). Rather than feeling disempowered by my silent role, I began, hyper-Jewishly, to feel guilty about the fact that he was promising me so much in the ketubah. I added my own elements to the wedding service: my husband and I wrote a comic guide to Jewish weddings which people read while I was in the basement, and at the reception I gave a 25-minute stand-up routine speech about marriage before presenting my husband with a ring. Ultimately, my wedding ended up being a satisfying merger of Jewish tradition and feminist, comic tradition. It was deeply special to perform a ritual, to get married under a *huppah* that had married Jewish couples for over 300 years. I stood and sat where three centuries of Jewish brides had been, and that made me feel connected to something bigger and beyond myself and my husband. The ceremony moved me precisely because it was beyond us. (Plus, the time in the basement gave me the last-minute chance to text my therapist 300 times.)

Married eight months now, I'm still neither Orthodox nor religious; I am not even kosher, and I haven't been to the dunker since my big day. But if anything, my big fat Orthodox Sephardi wedding taught me that there are things in Jewish tradition and law about femininity, gender and sexuality that are relevant, resonant and hugely interesting to a woman like me. Though I still find it hard to discuss this with many of Jewish female friends, mine is the story of a Jewish feminist whose marriage made me more subtly in tune with Judaism, who had to juggle contradictions, admit that nothing is simple, and that. Groucho notwithstanding, I can live with the elements of certain institutions. ■

Judy Batalion is a Canadian writer and performer currently living in New York City.

Standing SUSPENDED In This Miracle

A BRIDE TEACHES ABOUT CREATING A WEDDING HOUSE

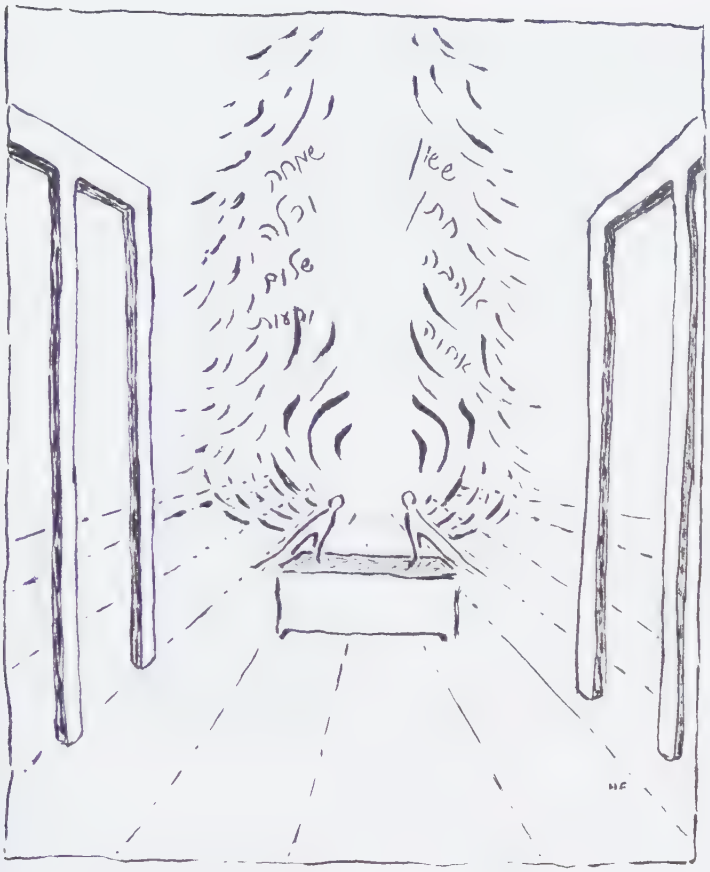
by ILANA KURSHAN

WHEN ILANA KURSHAN AND DANIEL FELDMAN GOT MARRIED IN DECEMBER 2009, THEY DECIDED TO CELEBRATE NOT JUST THEIR WEDDING, BUT ALSO THE CULMINATION OF THEIR MONTHS OF STUDYING TALMUD TOGETHER. SO AT A PRE-CEREMONY TISCH—A LEARNING SESSION TRADITIONALLY MEN-ONLY BUT WHICH HERE INCLUDED THE BRIDE, THE GROOM, AND ALL THEIR GUESTS—ILANA DELIVERED THIS D'VAR TORAH.

Daniel and I have chosen to speak today from *Masechet Bava Batra*, the tractate of Talmud that we are currently learning as part of *Daf Yomi*. This is a program in which thousands of Jews the world over learn the same page of Talmud every day, completing the cycle in seven and a half years. Our learning has taken a variety of forms. Some days we meet at a morning *shiur* (lesson) in a local synagogue, taught by Rabbi Benny Lau; other days we learn on our own after work; and still other days we meet in the evening to learn the *daf* together over dinner.

I'd like to teach from a recent *daf*, 98, where we find a learned discussion about a person who accepts a contract from a friend to build for him a *beit chatanot*, a wedding house for his son. The Mishnah considers the minimum size of house that is acceptable for this purpose, touching upon such issues as whether a person can choose to live in a home that resembles a cattle barn, and why a bride and groom are not advised to move in with their in-laws (at least according to Ben Sira, which may help to explain why his work is known as wisdom literature). In its discussion of the minimum dimensions of the wedding house, the Talmud draws an analogy to the Temple, which is often used as the model for other structures in rabbinic literature. Rabbi Chanina points out a contradiction between two different measurements of the Temple. In one verse, the *Kodesh Kodashim* (Holy of Holies) is 30 *amot* high; and in another verse, it is 20 amot high. The Talmud reconciles this contradiction by explaining that one measurement refers to the height of the Holy of Holies from floor to ceiling, whereas the other measurement starts from the tops of the *kruvim* (cherubim), which were 10 amot tall, and goes up to the ceiling. But why would one opt to measure from the tops of the kruvim rather than from the floor? The Talmud answers that this way of measuring comes to teach us that all 30 amot of the Holy of Holies were as empty as the uppermost 20 because the kruvim, the cherubs, took up no physical space.

Miraculously, the kruvim did not take up any room. They existed in spiritual space only, and not in the physical world. This expression speaks to me, for I am a person who lives very much inside her head. I feel very grateful—and relieved!—to have found a partner who is so practical and down-to-earth, someone who reminds me to cook food for myself, and prevents me from burning down my home while doing so. Much as I admire Daniel's pragmatism and his masterful organizational skills, I also feel privileged to be privy to his intellectual and spiritual depths. So much of our relationship developed in the context of classes we attended, poems we read, Shabbat meals we shared, and other tastes of the world to come—that world that is suspended somewhere beyond the physical and material realm. And so I love the next phrase that the Talmud uses to describe the kruvim: The kruvim were *suspended in a miracle*. This notion of being suspended in a miracle is very much how I feel today—as if my whole life until this day hangs in balance with the wondrous miracle of joining my life today with Daniel's, surrounded by so many people we both love. On this day of



ART: HARRIET FINCK

Even the Talmud is concerned with how to let another person into your space, into your life.

Kedusha (holiness) and of our *Kidushin* (wedding vows), we are not unlike the kruvim, suspended in a miracle in the midst of the Kodesh Kodashim.

The Talmud explains that part of the miraculous positioning of the kruvim was due to the fact their wingspans alone were equivalent to the entire width of the Holy of Holies. Where, then, were their bodies? The Talmud posits a series of possible answers: Perhaps they stood on a diagonal, or perhaps they stood with their wings overlapping, or perhaps they stood with their wings protruding from the center of their backs like chickens (this is the Talmud's image, not my own!). What I like about all of these answers is that they all have to do with how to share space—how to make room for another person, and how to let another person into your space. That this space is the Holy of Holies is not incidental. I feel privileged, in the past few months, that Daniel has made room for me in his life, and that I, in turn, have felt so eager to let him into mine. This intimate shared space, built on a deep trust that developed between us over time, is truly, to my mind, a sacred enclosure.

In speaking of the kruvim, the Talmud goes on to ask, How were they standing? Rabbi Yochanan and Rabbi Elazar disagree about this. One rabbi says that they were facing each other (perhaps looking into each other's eyes?), and the other rabbi says that they were facing the walls of the Kodesh Kodashim, meaning that they were turned away from each other. The Talmud famously resolves this contradiction by saying that both answers are correct, though they apply at different moments. When Israel is doing God's will, the two kruvim are facing each other; when Israel is not doing God's will, they are facing away from each other.

It is my hope, in our marriage, that we will spend most of our time facing towards and not away from each other, working in partnership to do God's will in the world. After all, it is from the space between the kruvim that God speaks to the people: "There I will meet with you, and I will speak to you, from above the cover, from between the two cherubim." (Exodus 25: 22)

God speaks from between the two kruvim, a space that our teacher Avivah Zornberg describes as the "locus of desire." I like to think that this is also the space between *Ish* and *Isha*, man and woman; that is, the space of *Shekhina*—the presence of God whose dwelling place is the Holy of Holies and all our holiest moments.

Of course, two people, no matter how much they are in love, cannot and should not always be looking at each other. And so when we are not looking at one another, I hope that we are at least looking in the same direction, as Daniel and I look together today towards our shared future. As we prepare to move into our own beit chatanot, we set our sights towards a future in which we will always have moments of looking into one another's eyes; always make space for one another; and always carry with us the memory of today, of standing suspended in this miracle. ■

Ilana Kurshan works in publishing in Jerusalem, where she lives.

JERUSALEM, 1989

WOMEN HANDLING OUR SACRED TEXTS

photo essay by **JOAN ROTH**

I've photographed Jewish women around the world and in almost every conceivable setting and occupation. I find myself drawn to women who are exploring Judaism's sacred texts from many different perspectives: as scholars and teachers, but also as the people actually creating the Torah scrolls themselves, and using them in new ways.

To my granddaughter, her bat mitzvah a few months ago was routine, not revolutionary. She led services and chanted her *haftorah* with ease, accompanied on the *bima* by a woman rabbi, cantor and gabai (lay expert), with her sister called up to read too. This is what she assumes girls and women always do.

In our time, Jewish women are scholars who study, teach, publicly read and write commentary on the Torah. But what's routine ritual for my granddaughters in North America is, in fact not yet legal for women at the Western Wall in Jerusalem; I photographed some of them reading from the Torah as close as they could get to the Wall. Maybe this is what the Kabbalist Moshe Chaim Luzatto meant when he said in the 18th century, "Every act of God travels through byways."

RABBI JUDITH HAUPTMAN, THE FIRST WOMAN PH.D. IN TALMUD

In *The Essential Talmud,* Adin Steinsalz wrote that "Time is an everflowing stream in which the present always obliterates the past." Hauptman, Professor of Talmud and Rabbinic Culture at the Jewish Theological Seminary and author of *Rereading the Rabbis: A Woman's Voice* (1998), which traces the development of women's legal status in Jewish law, agrees. "Yes, there is an incredible change in the world. People used to think that women couldn't absorb the material in the Talmud, that women didn't have the intellectual capabilities. But nobody would say that today. There may be groups of Jews who won't, in principle, teach women Talmud, but that's because they will cite precedent, not say women don't have the intellectual capacity. We have lived through this feminist revolution and come out the other side. We are not victims of the revolution; on the contrary, we are victors."

JEN TAYLOR FRIEDMAN — THE FIRST WOMAN TO WRITE A TORAH SCROLL

Now 30, she's writing her third scroll; she's also the woman who created the much-discussed doll "Tefillin Barbie." Growing up in Southampton, England, she always beat the boys on math exams. At Oxford she discovered she was as good at Talmudic reasoning and *halakha* as at math. Add in her talent for calligraphy. "I'm happy using the skills God gave me. I didn't decide I wanted to do this for some grandiose political reason; this career path opened up in front of me, and I followed it." In the 21st century, Jen could be a scribe just because she wanted to. Here, she publicly declares the completion of the scroll she wrote for Congregation Shir Tikvah of Troy, Michigan.

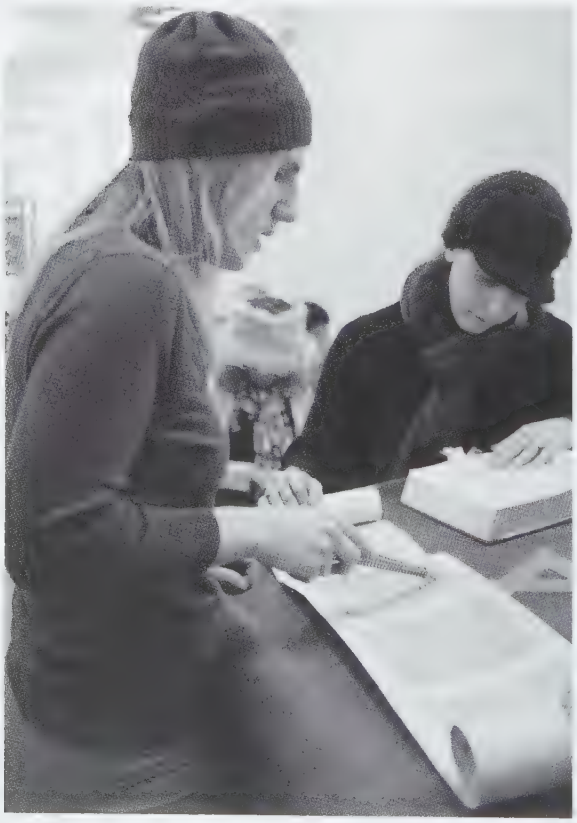
After 40 years of visually documenting the stories of Jewish women worldwide, doing so has become a way of life for me. We're living in a time of huge change, and it feels like a privilege to be able to keep the record this way.

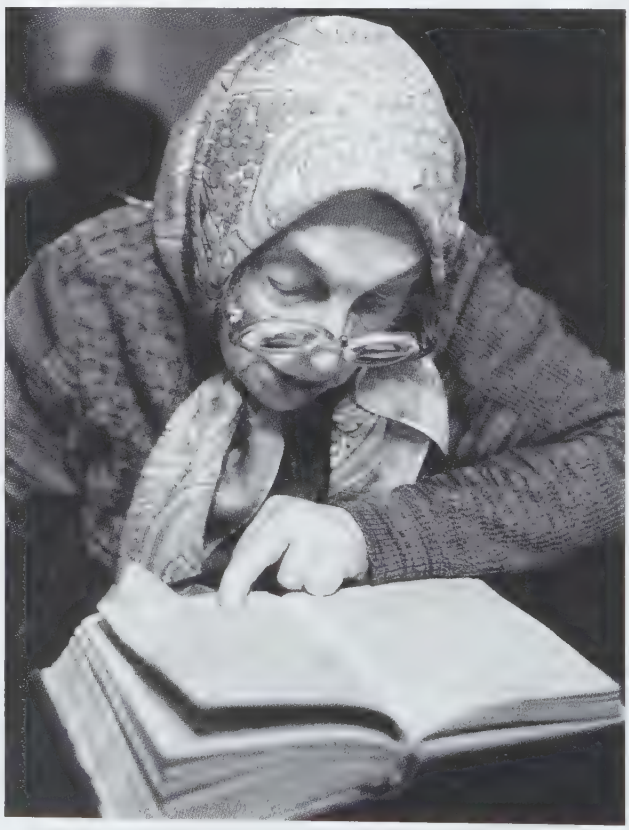
A SCHOLAR IN HER TIME

Dvoyra (whose last name I never knew) was brought up in a distinguished family of rabbis, all of whom were massacred at Babi Yar. I met her in 1987 at the Podil synagogue in Kiev. Dyvora invited me home with her. Though she spoke no English, and I didn't speak Russian, she indicated that she had a secret she wanted to share.

Her father's and brother's books had been confiscated during the Holocaust; she had hidden their *Chumash* (Five Books of Moses), wrapped in layers of fabric and plastic, atop her cupboard. The package hadn't been opened since she'd placed it there in the 1940s. She climbed on a chair to fetch the dusty relic, then unwrapped and opened it to her favorite page before sitting down to read, as if she had just handled the book yesterday. She wanted me to know her as the learned women she had insisted upon becoming, and who still trembled with the joy this knowledge brought her.

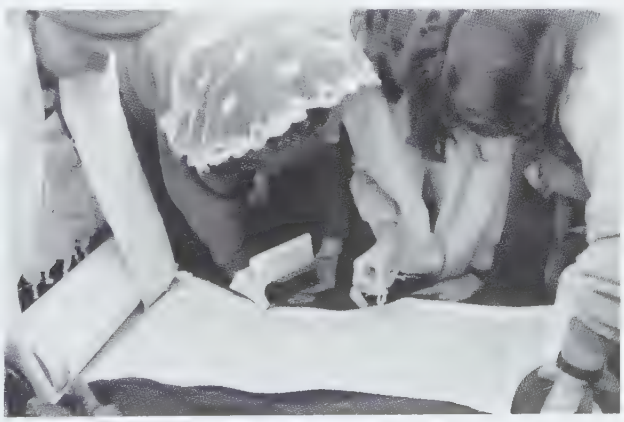
REBECCA HONIG FRIEDMAN READS THE MEGILLAH AT STANTON STREET SHUL, NEW YORK, PURIM, 2010





SIMCHAT BAT: WELCOMING A NEW DAUGHTER INTO THE COVENANT

Until feminist activists changed things in the 1970s, there was no ritual for welcoming a newborn Jewish daughter into Ashkenazi families. Now, the rabbi's manual of Conservative Judaism suggests several possible rituals: lighting seven candles (symbolizing the seven days of creation) and holding the baby towards them; wrapping the baby in the four corners of a tallit (prayer shawl); or lifting the baby and touching her hands to a Torah scroll. In this ceremony, an Orthodox rabbi symbolically "immerses" a newborn baby girl in the sacred Hebrew letters of a Torah scroll.



READING TORAH IN JERUSALEM

Like the photo on page 24, this one was taken in 1989, when the women of the International Committee of Women of the Wall gathered at the Archeological Garden, in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City.

STRUGGLING WITH THE TEXTS

Helène Aylon turns problematic passages into art installations. In "The Liberation of G-d, 1990–1996," she covered Bible passages with a transparent overlay, marking the misogynist lines with pink highlighter. She's a traditional woman with radical views, and her art startles with its frankness. In a recent installation at New York's Jewish Museum, she exhibited a petition challenging the edicts of Karo and Maimonides that "women and minors and idiots and slaves" could not judge nor give testimony. And in the Jewish Museum of Australia, "I Look into the Passages," highlights these texts with magnifiers. In a multicultural show now at Towson University, her "Self Portraits" show photographs with texts projected onto her face. Aylon says that "The Women's Section," shown in 1997, asked, "What would my pious Babas have said about my Torah highlighting? Would they have said, *Hindele, Miturnisht* (Helène, you mustn't) or would they have clasped their hands, *Geloipt su Guht, shoin tzeit* (Thanks be to G-d, it's about time.)"

I'm drawn to women scholar-activists who are actually creating the Torah scrolls themselves and using them in new ways.

THE FIRST WOMAN FROM THE NETHERLANDS TO BE A RABBI

Ordained in 1997 at the Academy for Jewish Religion, Chava Koster is the New York City Village Temple's rabbi. Here she is blowing the shofar at morning prayers on her front porch. Chava learned she was Jewish at age 7. After joining a Zionist youth group as a teen, by 16 she knew she would be a rabbi. The response from her family, who had survived the Holocaust in hiding and afterwards played down their Judaism, was "Impossible!" This was Amsterdam in the 1970s, and there had never been a woman rabbi in the Netherlands. "Watch me!" she told them.

MAKING TORAH PARCHMENT FROM DEERSKIN

Rabbi Linda Motzkin, co-rabbi with her husband, Jonathan Rubenstein, at Temple Sinai in Saratoga Springs, New York, processes deer hides into parchment panels which will be used for Torah scrolls. The hides are given to her by local hunters, two of whom are Jewish. Pictured (*left*) in 2008, she prepares a deer hide in her backyard, having already recited a blessing over it, removed the flesh and soaked the hide in a limewater solution to loosen the hair. Once the hair is removed, the cleaned hides are again soaked, stretched and dried on wooden frames (*below*), then sanded several times and trimmed to proportion. The technique is first to thin the hides, then get them whiter, smoother and more receptive to the scribal art of writing Hebrew letters with a turkey feather dipped in fresh black ink. Motzkin's project has turned into a communal effort; over 500 volunteers have assisted her so far. Although the process began in June 2007, at the rate Motzkin is going, she says she won't finish for 12 years.

YOUR BRAIN, ON L♥VE

Sex (and its presence—or absence—in relationships) has been an evergreen subject of books and research and talk shows. Think you've heard it all? Here are three ideas Lilith thinks are worth pondering.

1 ***BEING ON BIRTH-CONTROL PILLS—OR GOING OFF THEM—CAN CHANGE WHAT A WOMAN FINDS ATTRACTIVE IN A MAN. WHO KNEW? THE JOURNAL MIND REPORTS:***

Recent research suggests that the contraceptive pill—which prevents women from ovulating by fooling their body into believing it is pregnant—could affect which types of men women desire. Going on or off the pill during a relationship, therefore, may tempt a woman away from her man.

It's all about scent. Hidden in a man's smell are clues about his major histocompatibility complex (MHC) genes, which play an important role in immune system surveillance. Studies suggest that females prefer the scent of males whose MHC genes differ from their own, a preference that has probably evolved because it helps offspring survive: couples with different MHC genes are less likely to be related to each other than couples with similar genes are, and their children are born with more varied MHC profiles and thus more robust immune systems.

A study published in August [2008] in the *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*, however, suggests that women on the pill undergo a shift in preference toward men who share similar MHC genes. The female subjects were more likely to rate these genetically similar men's scents (via a T-shirt the men had worn for two nights) as pleasant and desirable after they went on the pill as compared with before. Although no one knows why the pill affects attraction, some scientists believe that pregnancy—or in this case, the hormonal changes that mimic pregnancy—draws women toward nurturing relatives.

Women who start or stop taking the pill, then, may be in for some relationship problems. A study published last year in *Psychological Science* found that women paired with MHC-similar men are less sexually satisfied and more likely to cheat on their partners than women paired with MHC-dissimilar men. So a woman on the pill, for example, might be more likely to start dating a MHC-similar man, but he could ultimately leave her less sexually satisfied. Then if she goes off the pill during the relationship, the accompanying hormonal changes will draw her even more strongly toward more MHC-dissimilar men. These immune genes may have a "powerful effect in terms of how well relationships are cemented," says University of Liverpool psychologist Craig Roberts, co-author of the August paper.

Melinda Wenner, "Birth Control Pills Affect Women's Taste in Men," December 2008.

2 ***PSYCHOTHERAPIST ESTHER PEREL, IN HER BOOK MATING IN CAPTIVITY, OFFERS A STARTLING OBSERVATION ON ONE OF THE REASONS WHY SEX WANES: TOO MUCH TALK. OOPS. FOR SOME WOMEN WHO HAVE TAKEN THE POWER OF INTIMATE CONVERSATION AS AN ARTICLE OF FAITH, THE FACT THAT THERE IS BODY LANGUAGE AS WELL AS SPOKEN LANGUAGE COMES AS NEWS. PEREL NOTES DRYLY THAT "TALK IS NOT THE ONLY AVENUE TO CLOSENESS," AND THEN EXPLAINED:***

TELL ME HOW YOU REALLY FEEL

In our era of communication, intimacy has been redefined. No longer is it the deep knowledge and familiarity that develop over time and can be cultivated in silence. Instead, we think of intimacy primarily as a discursive process, one that involves self-disclosure, the trustful sharing of our most personal and private material—our feelings. Of course, it is as much about listening as it is about telling. The receiver of these revelations must be a loving, accepting, nonjudgmental partner—a "good listener," empathetic and validating. We want to feel completely known, deeply recognized, and fully accepted for who we are; and we expect our sharing to be reciprocated.

…Much ink has been spilled to explain women's superior verbal ability in the emotional arena. For our purposes, suffice it to say that centuries of limited access to power have made us experts in relationship-building. The socialization of girls continues to emphasize the development of relational skills.

AND THE WORD DIDN'T BECOME FLESH

This having been said, the emphasis on "talk intimacy" is nonetheless problematic, for a number of reasons. The hegemony of the spoken word has veered into a female bias that has, for once, put men in a position of inferiority. Men are socialized to perform, to compete, and to be fearless. The capacity to express feelings is not a prized attribute in the making of American manhood. Dare I say it's not even considered a desirable one?—at least, not yet. When it comes to loving relationships, "talk intimacy" inevitably leaves many men at a loss. In this regime, they suffer from a chronic intimacy deficiency that needs ongoing repair.

So much of masculine identity is predicated on self-control and invulnerability. Yet I have also observed that these very restrictions lead many men to other venues of self-expression. In the absence of a more developed verbal narrative of the self, the body becomes a vital language, a conduit for emotional intimacy. While much has been written about the aggressive manifestations of male sexuality, it is not sufficiently appreciated that the

erotic realm also offers men a restorative experience for their more tender side. The body is our original mother tongue, and for a lot of men it remains the only language for closeness that hasn't been spoiled. Through sex, men can recapture the pure pleasure of connection without having to compress their hard-to-articulate needs into the prison of words.

BODIES SPEAK, TOO

Favoring speech as the primary pathway to intimacy reinforces the notion that women's sexual desire is legitimate only when it is embedded in relatedness—only through love can female carnality be redeemed.

Historically, women's sexuality and intellect have never been integrated. Women's bodies were controlled, and their sexuality was contained, in order to avert their corrupting impact on men's virtue. Femininity, associated with purity, sacrifice, and frailty, was a characteristic of the morally successful woman. Her evil twin, the succubus (whore, slut, concubine, witch) was the earthy, sensual, and frankly lusty woman who had traded respectability for sexual exuberance. Vigorous sexuality was the exclusive domain of men. Women have continuously sought to disentangle themselves from the patriarchal split between virtue and lust, and are still fighting this injustice. When we privilege speech and underplay the body, we collude in keeping women confined.

…Mitch and Laura exemplify two extremes on the mind-body continuum. Couples are often configured on opposite sides of this divide. There are those for whom the body is like a prison in which they feel confined, self-conscious, and self-critical. The body is an inhibited site, awkward and tense. Play and inventiveness have no place there. Words feel safer than gesture and movements, and these people take refuge in speech. When reaching out to others, they prefer the verbal route. Then there are those for whom the body is like a playground, a place where they feel free and unrestricted.

They retain the child's capacity to fully inhabit their bodies. In the physical realm, they can let go; they don't have to be responsible. They are often the partner in the relationship who wants more physical intimacy. It is especially during lovemaking that they are able to escape their inner rumblings. For them, sex is a relief that puts a halt to their anxiety; for their more verbal partners, sex turns out to be a source of anxiety.

As a therapist, I seek to make each partner more fluent in the language of the other. Laura's experience has robbed her of the capacity to recognize the body's vocabulary. Like many women, she battles the age-old repressions of female sexuality that have trapped women in passivity and made us dependent on men to seduce and initiate us into sexuality. Economic and professional independence notwithstanding, Laura remains sexually dependent. She leaves it to Mitch to figure out what she wants. Together, we explore the tortuous conflicts between desire and denial, wanting and not having, gratification and repression. I invite Laura to engage with her fantasies, to own her wanting, and to take responsibility for her sexual fulfillment. I steer her attention to her physical self, and challenge her to break through the vigilance, the guilt, and the disavowal that surround her sexuality. Can she look her mother straight in the eye and still maintain a sense of herself as a sensual being? Can she indulge in her own eroticism and declare the "nice girl" officially void?

From the book Mating in Captivity *by Esther Perel. Copyright ©2006 by Esther Perel. Reprinted by arrangement with Harper, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers.*

3 DO THE ANTIDEPRESSANT DRUGS KNOWN AS S.S.R.I.S—MOST COMMONLY PROZAC, ZOLOFT, PAXIL, CELEXA, LUVOX, AND LEXAPRO—IMPEDE PEOPLE'S LOVE LIVES IN SIGNIFICANT WAYS? BIOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGIST HELEN E. FISHER, KNOWN FOR HER SCIENTIFIC STUDIES OF LOVE, LUST AND ROMANTIC ATTACHMENT (SHE IS ALSO CHIEF SCIENTIFIC ADVISOR TO THE INTERNET DATING SITE CHEMISTRY.COM, A DIVISION OF MATCH.COM), HAS A LOT TO SAY ABOUT THIS.

It is well known that these medications can cause emotional blunting and dysfunction in sexual desire, arousal, and performance in upward of three of every four patients. But we are writing now to add that we believe these side effects have even more serious consequences than currently appreciated, due to their impact on several other related neural mechanisms.... [S]erotonin-enhancing antidepressants can jeopardize one's ability to fall in love.

Due to their impact on the sex drive, these medications can also jeopardize other brain/body mechanisms that govern mate assessment, mate choice, pair formation, and partner attachment. For example, female orgasm has many functions. Among them, it aids sperm retention and enables women to discriminate between self-centered as opposed to dedicated partners—partners who might be more likely to help them rear their young. Female orgasm may also help women choose men with better genes, as women are more orgasmic with men who are healthy and symmetrical, markers of good testosterone load. Female orgasm may also enhance feelings of attachment, because it stimulates the release of oxytocin and prolactin. As these drugs impair or eliminate female orgasm, they interfere with delicate biological mechanisms designed to aid mate choice and partner attachment. As these S.S.R.I. medications impair male orgasm, they also jeopardize a male's ability to court, inseminate, and attach to a potential partner.

From "Prozac and Sexual Desire" by Helen E. Fisher and J. Anderson Thomson Jr., in a letter to The New York Review of Books, *March 20, 2008. Read more of what Helen Fisher has discovered about anti-depressants and an inability to fall in love at Helenfisher.com*

Politics in the Kitchen

a short story by ELAINE SILVERSTEIN

The telephone rang just as Miriam finished loading the breakfast dishes into the dishwasher. Even though Ella would arrive in a few minutes, Miriam preferred to leave a clean kitchen. She considered it an act of civility. And although neither woman had ever mentioned it, she thought Ella appreciated the gesture.

"Why don't you leave that for the *dinst*?" Her mother-in-law, who was seated at the breakfast table dunking bits of English muffin into a saucer of honey, looked up to scold her. "You're going to spoil her."

"Ella has plenty to do."

"But it's her job."

"Not in this house," Miriam said. "What's the big deal about putting a few cereal bowls and coffee cups in the dishwasher?" She straightened and reached for the wall phone next to the sink. "Good morning." She spoke in her cheerful morning voice.

"You didn't get a call either," Sherry said by way of greeting.

"No, but it's just as well. I've worked every day this week. My fridge is running on empty."

"Then do you want to go to Thrifty Market with me? They're having a special on skirt steaks."

"I never make it. David thinks the meat's too stringy."

"You have to slice it on the diagonal. Your knife needs to be kept really flat. You've seen them cut salmon… same principle. Anyway, c'mon. You said your fridge was empty."

"I can't. Sorry."

"Why not?"

Miriam debated telling a lie, *I'm taking Mina to the doctor,* or *I've got a teacher conference,* or *Ella isn't coming*—but decided against it. She was a lousy liar. "I'm playing in the league match."

"Oh?" There was a silence. "I thought you were making yourself free in case you got a call to substitute."

"Yes, but I didn't get a call. Then Susan phoned to say they were short a player, and I said okay… I mean I am still part of the team." Miriam sighed. Why was she so defensive? "We could go to the grocery this afternoon," she offered.

"No thanks. I've got other plans this afternoon. You're not the only one with things to do."

"C'mon Sher, don't be like that. It's no big deal."

"Easy for you to say. It always works out for you."

"It doesn't always work out for me."

"Oh yes it does. How many days have you worked this month?"

"I don't know. I haven't counted… maybe ten."

PAINTING: "RUBBER GLOVES," ALISA SINGER

"See. I've only worked four days and Monday is the twenty-second already."

"You know it's only because that teacher was in an accident. I got lucky."

"But you were the one who got the call to come in and substitute, weren't you?" Sherry's voice was full of accusation.

"Sherry, first of all, Mrs. Sherman is an English teacher. A twelfth-grade honors English teacher, for God's sake. Shakespeare, Robert Penn Warren, William Faulkner. I know the material. That's what I am: an English teacher."

"Not anymore. You're just a substitute, same as me. Anyone can follow a lesson plan. I could teach the class too. And I need the money. You don't."

"Sherry, stop. I don't decide who gets called. It's all chance."

"That's just the point. You've always been the lucky one."

Miriam looked at the clock and at her mother-in-law who was pointedly rustling the newspaper as she turned the pages. She didn't have time for this conversation. She looked at her bare feet. Her shoes lay just under the counter. She sat down on the kitchen stool, cupping the phone between her shoulder and ear, using her freed-up hands to put on her socks and tennis shoes. She noticed that one of the pom-poms on her sock was hanging on by a thread.

"Anyway, we need to talk about Pesach."

"What about it?"

"Well, what's the menu?"

"The usual… I'll do my apricot chicken. You'll do the fish."

"Why do I always have to do the fish?"

"Because you know how to make gefilte fish and I don't."

"It'll stink up my kitchen."

"Why don't you use jarred fish?" Miriam's mother-in-law called from her seat. Clearly, she was listening to Miriam despite the page rattling. "I know a good recipe to doctor it up. A little onion, a few carrots; nobody will even know the difference."

"Mina suggests we use jarred fish. She says nobody will even know the difference," Miriam told her sister.

"Oh God, is that snoop eavesdropping on our conversation?"

"Why, yes," Miriam said sweetly. "She's feeling better every day. Thanks for asking. I'll tell her you asked about her."

Sherry snorted. "You wimp… Anyway, that woman can't even boil water for tea. Tell her the difference is store-bought fish tastes like caca."

Miriam sighed. "Sherry, what do you want to do?"

"I guess I'll have to make the fish."

"Good."

"You know it's your husband and your son who are the biggest fans of my fish."

"I know."

"By rights, you should make the fish."

"Except I don't know how, I've never made it in my life. If I made fish it would taste worse than caca."

"I could teach you."

"No thanks… I'll make the soup."

"I always make the soup. I make the best soup."

"I know you do," Miriam tried to sound supportive. "Just don't take on more than you're comfortable doing."

"Now you want to make me feel guilty. I can do it. I'll make it early and freeze it."

Miriam looked at the clock again. "Sher, I've got to go. I'll call you later."

"But we haven't settled on the desserts."

"Sherry, Passover is almost a month away."

"So what? It's good to think ahead. Anyway, shall I pick up anything for you at the Thrifty?"

"No thanks. I told you, I'm going to the supermarket later. I have a list as long as my arm."

"You should go to Thrifty. That store has much better quality and much better prices."

"But it's a shlep. I'll just go to the Food Giant."

"Anyway, I'll pick you up some nice chopped meat… maybe you'll make a meatloaf."

Through her kitchen window, Miriam watched a blue Lexus SUV pull into her drive.

"Sherry, they're here. I love you. But I've gotta go. How about lunch later?"

"How can you make a lunch date? Don't you have your tennis ladies?"

"I'll blow them off."

"I'd have to stop home and put away the perishables first. Besides, I might get inspired. I might want to cook something."

"Then what about tomorrow? We'll do the menu from soup to nuts."

"You mean from hard-boiled eggs to sponge cake." Sherry giggled.

"Right, so, what do you say? Lunch tomorrow?'

"What if you get a call to teach?"

"I'll turn it down."

"Well, if I get called, I'm going to take it. I told you I've only worked four days this entire month."

"Okay, so if you aren't teaching, then can we have lunch?"

"We'll see. Call me in the morning." She lowered her voice to a whisper. "And don't invite Minnie-ha-ha, just us, okay?"

"Yes, okay…"

There were two long impatient toots from the waiting car.

"Sherry, they're blowing the horn, I need to hang up."

"Oh, tell them to blow it out their ass."

"Such elegant language."

"It's just an expression," Sherry laughed. "Grandma used to say it all the time when she was teaching me to drive. I'd be going kinda slow down the middle of the street and some driver would start honking. '*Blow it out your ass*,' Grandma would say. Then she'd say to me '*Don't let it bother you, Sherilah. They have no manners.*'"

Miriam laughed. "Where did she ever learn that?"

The horn honked again. "Sherry, let me go. I'll see you tomorrow."

"Anyway, I'm going to drop you off some chopped meat. I'll just leave it in your fridge."

The horn sounded again.

"Sherry, whatever. I'm holding them up. Please…"

"Okay, okay. Goodbye and good luck." The phone went dead.

Miriam looked at the phone, wondering if she ought to call her sister back. "Shit," she whispered as she put the phone in its cradle.

Again the horn sounded—three short, impatient toots.

"Your friends are so impatient," Mina clucked. "A person

"Blow it out your ass," Grandma would say. Then she'd say to me, "Don't let it bother you, Sherilah. They have no manners."

should be more considerate."

"We've got a match; they don't want to be late."

"So what did your sister say?"

"She thinks we should have meatloaf for dinner."

Mina shook her head. "That's all she's got to think about? What you have for dinner?"

Miriam bent to kiss her mother-in-law's powdery cheek. "I'll see you later. Ella will make you a nice lunch."

"I thought you said the refrigerator was empty."

"There's plenty for lunch."

"Like what?"

"Ma, please—there's eggs, there's tuna, there's cottage cheese."

"I had the cottage cheese yesterday."

"Ella can make you a nice grilled cheese sandwich. Or else just tell her what you feel like having. "

"You know, darling, I don't want to be any trouble. I can eat anything."

"You're no trouble," Miriam assured the older woman. "We love having you. And you're getting stronger every day. You'll be home in no time."

"I hope so. I like to be around my own things." Mina smiled at Miriam, holding out her mug. "Would you mind just hotting this up before you leave? You really ought to have a tea cozy."

Miriam took the mug without a word and refilled it from the new Michael Graves kettle with its cheery blue-bird perched on the spigot. "Do you want a fresh tea bag?"

"Oh no," Mina looked at the soggy bag that sat on a saucer near her elbow. "There's still life in this one. I'll just sit here and wait for the *dinst* to help me dress."

"Ella. Her name is Ella. She'll be here soon."

"I know her name. I'm not senile just yet," Mina said. She looked at her daughter–in-law who had her back to her, gathering her things. "You've got something hanging from the back of your shoe."

"It's just a pom-pom." Miriam stooped to rip off the droopy, little ball. "Who cares?"

"I was just trying to be helpful," Mina said "You must have gotten up on the wrong side of bed this morning. You're so grouchy."

"Sorry," Miriam apologized."I guess I'm feeling a little pressured."

"Pressured? Why should you be pressured? You don't have to work, you know. Surely my son makes a good living… doesn't he?"

"Mina, please." Miriam interrupted "Not now. We'll talk about this later."

"Sure, don't listen to me. I'm just an old lady. What do I know? If you want to be a feminist, be my guest." She picked up the newspaper.

"I'll be back around two," Miriam said "Maybe you'd like to take a ride with me to go shopping?"

"Perhaps," Mina spoke from behind her curtain of newsprint. "If you're in a better mood."

Once more, the horn sounded. This time it was a prolonged, I'm-leaning-on-the-horn, last chance blast.

"Oh, blow it out your ass," Miriam muttered picking up her sports bag.

"What?" Mina asked. "Are you saying something to me?"

Miriam didn't respond. Her mind was a million miles away. She could clearly picture her tiny, red-haired grandmother sitting propped up by two flowered, cretonne covered cushions in what the family called Ma's Sewing Machine, a battered white Ford Falcon. The car's backseat cluttered with cast-offs destined for the sisterhood rummage sale whenever it might be scheduled. Only Miriam's sister Sherry, eager for a driver's license, begged to practice her driving skills in that car. Miriam could imagine Grandma Ida sitting unruffled, as Sherry, white knuckles gripping the steering wheel, peered doe-eyed and panicky into the rear-view mirror.

Fiercely protective, Grandma Ida, put the blame where she knew it belonged—on some inconsiderate stranger. Who needed him to honk the horn? It was obvious the child was just a learner. She'd give him a piece of her mind.

Although, Miriam thought, Grandma probably said "blow it out of your *tuchas*;" a full sentence in English always eluded her. But whatever she said, Sherry had never forgotten.

You had to smile.

"Mirry, are you all right?" Mina's voice cut through Miriam's reverie. "Your friends are blasting my head off, not to mention disturbing the neighbors."

Miriam looked over at the old woman seated at the table; osteoporosis had morphed the once comely body into a neckless lump covered in pale blue chenille from which a pair of elegant, long fingered, hands with meticulously manicured pink nails protruded.

"Mina, would you like it, if I came home for lunch? Maybe we'll have time for a game of Scrabble?"

"I'd prefer Kalooky."

"Your choice."

"What about the grocery store?"

"We'll do that too. We've got all afternoon."

"Okay, maybe I'll be up to it." Mina sighed. "I can try."

"My Grandma Ida use to say, 'Angels can do no more'."

"*Idakeh*," Mina chuckled, "she had a saying for everything." She picked up a spoon to mash her teabag against the side of her teacup wringing the last bit of flavor from the sodden mass. "You know," she said "I think you're going to have nice weather this morning. Thank God it won't be too hot."

"Right." Miriam said and was out the door. ■

Elaine Silverstein is chairman of one of the country's largest female-owned advertising agencies, and a story-teller. Her work has appeared in numerous journals, and she recently completed a memoir.

I ATE MY MOTHER'S HAIR

by RUTH SABATH ROSENTHAL

I ate my mother's hair
standing behind her, as she sat
on a stool in the shower stall

of her nursing home bathroom,
tile floor catching the silver snippets
I cut from her statue-still head.

What could I do with the comb
when I had to wield the scissors
with one hand, clasp her locks

with the other, Mother's tangled
brain not letting her grasp that
she could ease my task, she could

turn her head when asked, hold the comb
and look in the mirror when I finished,
see what a fine job I did? Every month

for seven years, I stood at the sink
in that bathroom rinsing her traces
out of my mouth, the sadness.

Ruth Sabath Rosenthal, a NY poet, has been published in a variety of literary journals and anthologies. Her work was nominated for a 2006 Pushcart Prize.

REVIEWS

Coping with Chronic Illness

Being well, being sick, and why communication is key

Lightning never strikes twice, goes the cliché. But if you—or a family member—suffer from a severe chronic illness, you learn all too quickly that even on the sunniest day lurks the potential for medical catastrophe to strike like lightening—unexpectedly and many times over.

How does one live with such uncertainty? This question is central to two new books about the emotional impact of chronic illness not just on those who bear the diagnosis but on their extended families, as well: ***Invisible Sisters: A Memoir*** by **Jessica Handler** (PublicAffairs, $24.95) and ***Dancing at the River's Edge: A Patient and Her Doctor Negotiate Life with Chronic Illness*** by **Alida Brill** and **Michael D. Lockshin** (Schaffner Press, $23.95). Taken together, these volumes also underline the crucial role, not just life-saving but life-enhancing, a caring physician can play—and provide models, positive and negative, for what happens when communication thrives, and when it fails.

Jessica Handler's cogent memoir chronicles her life as the "well" sibling to two younger, tragically unwell sisters. At the age of six, Susie, two years younger than Jessica, is diagnosed with acute lymphocytic leukemia. The time is the 1960s, and with successful treatments for childhood blood cancers still years away, Susie dies when she is eight. Her loss is devastating in its own right and even more so for its foreshadowing of future loss: Sarah, at four the youngest Handler sister, has already displayed symptoms of a different blood disease, eventually diagnosed as Kostmann's Syndrome, a chronic ailment in which periods of relative calm and "normal" life alternate with sudden debilitating setbacks and emergency hospitalizations

Alas, the Handler family as a whole suffers from another chronic failure: silence. It is a symptom itself of the ill-matched coping styles of the distraught parents—depressive/avoidant Jack and practical-minded Mimi—but their withdrawal from each other translates into even more unspoken anguish not just about the wellbeing of the sisters but about their crumbling marriage. And so the household becomes one in which fears are shushed, questions are discouraged, and expressions of comfort and concern come uneasily. Amid this atmosphere, Sarah, who will die at 29, valiantly struggles to grow into a "normal" teenager and adult. And Jessica, suffering from survivor guilt, flees home in search of her own brand of normalcy. She moves to California, where she throws herself into her career as a film production coordinator—and dabbles with cocaine to shut out her emotions. Eventually, she does find peace with her family and herself, but the struggle is long and intense.

Could this family have held together even if illness had not struck? Who knows? But any family struggling to manage the multi-faceted challenges of chronic illness could benefit from *Dancing at the River's Edge*, a compelling dual memoir by Alida Brill, who has suffered from a rare autoimmune disease since adolescence, and her long-time physician, Michael D. Lockshin.

Anyone reading Brill's official biography—she is an esteemed author, researcher, social critic and women's rights activist—would not guess at her other "identity" as patient. That is one of her chief points: it is more than possible to create a fully realized life as an individual, not a sick body in a hospital bed. But the task becomes that much tougher in the absence of doctors who fail to recognize each patient as a person. Lockshin's entries—he and Brill alternate chapters throughout—emphasize his view of the dialogue between physician and patient as a negotiation centering on the patient's needs. Throughout, his message is simple but essential: doctors need to listen to their patients, and care for and attend to them as the human beings they are. In *Dancing at the River's Edge*, Brill and Lockshin provide a model for doctor-patient partnership all too rarely seen. Any family coping with chronic illness should read this book—and then give it to their doctor.

DIANE COLE

Sexism in the City

New branding, still the same junk

Why are young girls being sold Naughty Nurse costumes for Halloween? In ***Sexism in America: Alive, Well, and Ruining Our Future*** (Lawrence Hill Books, $24.95), **Barbara Berg** argues that despite recent headlines, sexism in America is thriving. "Sexism is now applauded like the comeback kid, newly equipped and stronger than before. Massively destructive, it's brazenly obliterating years of women's progress." Berg draws upon evidence from legal cases, personal anecdotes, surveys, popular culture, scientific studies, and politics to debunk the myth of a post-feminist era in America. Instead, she argues that as society has changed in the last 50 years, sexism, too, has evolved—assuming a variety of guises, but ever present.

Sexism in America explores answers to questions familiar to many American women: Why did a Target billboard in Times Square feature a young woman lying spread-eagled with a bull's eye painted on her crotch? How has the concept of choice become a "verbal sledgehammer used to silence complex explanations for women's decision?" Why did the female characters in the popular films "Knocked Up," "Juno," and "Waitress" not seriously consider an abortion? Why have 75% of the characters in the top-grossing G-rated movies from the last 15 years all been male? Why can a pharmacist's discretion come between a woman and her emergency contraception?

While Berg's answers to these questions are often unsurprising, the colorful evidence she draws upon offers a much-needed perspective on contemporary society. Berg examines the post-September 11th media coverage that casts women as mothers and wives in contrast to the hyper-masculinized firefighters and construction workers. In the aftermath of the towers' collapse, there was "a rush to defend and bolster an American manhood compromised and belittled by the attacks." Men were the celebrated heroes, and women were the aggrieved victims.

Noticeably absent from *Sexism* is any discussion of how religion or class affect the way Americans think about issues of gender and sexism. Further, the book assumes a level of ideological commitment, so it will be ineffective, alas, in swaying those not yet converted to the feminist camp. Still, Berg offers an entertaining crash course in contemporary American sexism. Read *Sexism* before you shop for your Purim firefighter costumes this year—for your daughters, of course.

ARIELLA KURSHAN

Twins, Intertwined

That most intimate of sibling relationships

The two sets of twins most discussed in the Torah are men who are in jealous conflict with one another to the point of actual or impending fratricide (Cain and Abel; Jacob and Esau). They present quite a contrast to the stories of twinship in ***One and the Same: My Life as an Identical Twin and What I've Learned About Everyone's Struggle to Be Singular*** by **Abigail Pogrebin** (Doubleday, $26.95).

The book moves forward on two levels, the first being a series of chapters on the many aspects of being a twin that non-twins will find fascinating and twins (and their families) will probably find extraordinarily validating. These areas include the issue of twin love for one another, the effects of being a twin on other love relationships, competition between twins, the struggle for separation and individuation, the meaning of genetic sameness and the facts of epigenetic differences (caused by factors in the environment) and the impact of the loss of a twin relationship through death. The second level of the book is about the author's own journey to understand her relationship with her 43-year-old twin sister, Robin. Throughout the text (and highlighted at the end of each chapter) are Abigail's ruminations and passages from interviews Abigail has done with Robin, exploring their relationship. In their current lives, Abigail revels in her twinness and is seeking more intensity in their relationship, while Robin is working more on individuation, wanting to be known as a singular person, rather than as one half of a twin pair. Their struggle is presented in an authentic, poignant and riveting manner.

The book includes quotes from interviews with many professionals who have done research or clinical work with twins (and who themselves are often twins or married to twins). They offer ideas and suggestions that would be helpful to any family with twins. The most practical piece of advice that I (a non-twin psychologist) gleaned from the book was that parents of twins should be very careful to spend time with each twin separately, even if the twins don't want to do it. Pogrebin stresses the importance of each twin being known as an individual to their parents, a goal most likely attained through time spent with each parent singularly.

The struggle to be known as an individual (rather than only as part of a twin pair) reminded me of similar issues faced by women enmeshed in traditional marital relationships (as portrayed in the TV show *Mad Men*, or described in Betty Friedan's classic book *The Feminine Mystique*). Women in these relationships often felt that their identity existed only as part of the couple. If we change the word "sister" to "husband" in this quote from *One and the Same*, we may begin to see how the complete loss of self in any

If we change the word "sister" to "husband," we see how the complete loss of self in any relationship can lead to emotional difficulties.

relationship can lead to emotional difficulties. "My sense of self was organized around my sister, so once she and I were apart... I had no idea who I was...."

NECHAMA LISS-LEVINSON

Reading the Russians

How can life compare to literature?

Two new books, ***The Possessed*** by **Elif Batuman** (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, $15) and ***What Happened to Anna K.*** by **Irina Reyn** (Touchstone, $24), explore uses of literature—particularly Russian literature—in the lives of individuals both real and fictional.

Elif Batuman is a large, fearless personality and her text is filled with intimate details, ironic asides, and hilarious associations that form a series of loosely connected autobiographical essays "about love and fascination with Russianness." Batuman, the child of Turkish immigrants, was born in New York, raised in New Jersey, and educated at Harvard and Stanford. *The Possessed* is a charming, youthful description of her coming of age—getting lost and finding herself through reading (she reads everything from Pushkin to Emperor Zaxiriddin Muhammad Bobur to Borges). At the same time she chronicles her adventures in the seemingly zany culture of Slavic scholarship, traveling from Cambridge to Ankara, Budapest, Provincetown, Stanford, "the backwaters of Central Anatolia," Moscow, Tashkent, Samarkand, Tolstoy's estate at Yasnaya Polyana, Chekhov's estate at Melikhovo, St. Petersburg, and Florence. In the process she becomes the judge of a Hungarian "leg contest"; does calisthenics in the bus stations of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan; has her eyebrows painted with henna; and dines in the apartment of the 84-year-old translator of Lazhechnikov's *House of Ice* who, with gracious Russian hospitality, prepares "an entire dinner, with egg salad and a wonderful *rassolnik* (a soup made with pickles and brine)..."

While *The Possessed* is an amusing book, it's also serious. The author offers excellent insights about the boundaries between literature and life. About Tolstoy and Anna Karenina: "How had any human being ever managed to write something simultaneously so big and so small...so strange and so natural? The heroine didn't turn up until chapter 18... Anna's maid and daughter were both also called Anna...The repetition of names in particular struck me as simultaneously very strange and very true to life." At the same time, she bemoans the randomness of real life which Tolstoy's great novel approaches. In real life, she notes, things happen one after another, "like items on a shopping list." Real events may be intriguing or poignant but "they won't assume the shape of a wonderful book."

Paradoxically, Irina Reyn, who was born in Russia and emigrated to the United States as a child, has written a novel structured on the plot of Tolstoy's masterpiece which is lighter and filled with characters from the petite bourgeoisie who think in terms of shopping lists: "What to wear, what to wear? Katia had agonized for weeks. The perfect dress did not present itself until two days before the party..." Her Anna is a Russian-Jewish immigrant from Rego Park who marries the wealthy but boring Alex K. and moves to Manhattan's East Side. The book satirizes such "sausage immigrants"—"Papochka sat in his boxers on the living room couch, buried inside a *Novoye Russkoye Slovo*. His fingers were black with newsprint..."

Her parents no longer read Dostoyevsky—Haven't they suffered enough... after 30 years of communism, didn't they deserve Danielle Steele?

Like the real Elif Batuman, the fictional Anna K. often holds a book up to nature, measuring figures she meets against romantic heroes—Heathcliff and Mr. Darcy (or intellectuals in Woody Allen's films), wishing that life could be like art. Interestingly, she also thinks about literature's limitations, noting, "Even her parents no longer read Dostoyevsky—Haven't they suffered enough... after 30 years of communism, didn't they *deserve* Danielle Steel?" So the history of Russia, not Russianness, causes Anna K.—not Anna Karenina—to draw a line around the uses of literature.

FRANCES BRENT

Torah and Taboo

Reinventing Jewish sexual ethics

The Passionate Torah: Sex and Judaism (NYU Press, $19.95) is a "playground," in the words of editor **Danya Ruttenberg**, for exploring and re-imagining a contemporary sexual ethic based in the Jewish tradition. The anthology derives from Ruttenberg's premise that "as much as Judaism has to teach us about sexual relationships... from our contemporary perspective, its teachings may feel uncomfortable or deeply challenging." None of the thinkers who contributed to the book shy away from critique. They uncover and deconstruct misogynistic, sexist, homophobic, pornographic, and xenophobic outlooks found in the Jewish texts we have inherited; still they honor the very same tradition as a source for reconstructing a contemporary, healthy sexual ethic.

The voices in *The Passionate Torah* are articulate and refreshingly diverse. The first third of the book delves into Jewish sources in an effort to reveal the sexist underpinnings of many Jewish institutions: Sarra Lev analyzes the pornographic elements of the Biblical *sotah* ritual (in which the Temple priest tests a woman suspected of adultery by ripping her clothes and uncovering her hair, thus playing into a reader's—or listener's—prurient interest in the punish-

Shanghai on My Mind: *What we never knew about this Jewish Diaspora*

If you didn't know where to look, you could easily miss it—faint writing on a brick wall in an old section of Shanghai. The words are German: "Horn's Imbiss Stube" and "Café Atlantis." A snack bar and a coffee house. Remnants of an almost forgotten time, when some 18,000 Jews, mostly German and Austrian, fled Hitler and found haven in Shanghai.

The history of these Jews has all the elements of gripping narrative: the highly refined Jews of Germany and Austria arriving in Shanghai harbor with their furs and woolen suits, ignorant of the hot and humid clime rife with typhoid; rich Baghdad Jews and Russian Jews who maintained their separate worlds; Chinese coolies pulling rickshaws to opium dens and gambling establishments; a European community of merchants, diplomats and spies; Japanese occupation forces maintaining a low level of law interspersed with cruelty. All this in the one city in the world open to entry without visa or passport.

The story of these Jews who escaped the Nazi crematoria by finding refuge halfway around the world seems largely untold, perhaps because the horrors of Hitler's Final Solution make everything else pale in comparison, perhaps because Jewish cemeteries with the 2,000 dead from that time have vanished. The relatively few Jews who stayed on after the war left when the Communists took over in 1949, one year after the founding of the State of Israel.

Shanghai Refuge, A Memoir of the World War II Jewish Ghetto (University of Nebraska Press, $15.95) by **Ernest G. Heppner** is a scrupulously researched history, and includes pictures of the dashing young Heppner from refugee Rover Scout to Shanghai bridegroom along with archival photos of life in the ghetto. It's only too bad that Heppner, who arrived in Shanghai in 1939 at the age of 17, sold his own camera early on.

Heppner's "Survival" chapter documents how starving and sick Jews, amazingly, created a cultural life of concerts, lectures and plays in the Hongkew ghetto. Starting in 1943, the stateless European Jews were confined to this area roughly three-quarters of a square mile in size, coexisting with the slum's impoverished Chinese population. At least as important for Jewish memory is the chapter's far-reaching indictment of Jewish aid organizations in Shanghai.

Heppner's mother was a major source of information on the Jewish assistance organizations. A high-energy woman, she went from running the family hotel in the German mountainside to supporting herself and her son as a caseworker for Shanghai refugee relief committees. She then became a social worker with the Joint Distribution Committee. Documenting her experience, Heppner details the shocking lack of supervision and the self-serving behavior of staff within the various Jewish associations trying to keep the Shanghai refugees alive. He criticizes the established Jewish communities for giving the refugees handouts rather than funds to start their own businesses.

Belying the Jewish stereotype, Heppner was not particularly close to his mother. In fact, he doesn't even mention her name. (He does name his father and sister, whom he never saw again after he and his mother left for Shanghai.)

Mrs. Heppner may go nameless, but she does emerge as a spirited woman. Defying German orders to take no valuables, she dared to smuggle some wristwatches out of the country. She might well have been sent back following the border body search if Heppner hadn't convinced her to throw the wristwatches from the train en route to Italy. And when Heppner, his wife, his wife's family and his mother finally made it to America, he settled in Indianapolis and his mother stayed in Brooklyn. She eventually moved to Switzerland, living to the age of 97 in a retirement home in Basel.

In reconstructing history, we're on shakier ground with ***Ten Green Bottles, The True Story of One Family's Journey From War-torn Austria to the Ghettos of Shanghai*** by **Vivian Jeanette Kaplan** (St. Martin's Press, $23.95). In this vivid recreation, Kaplan seemingly channels her mother, writing in the first person voice of Nini Karpel. Nini, who grew up privileged in Vienna, fled with her family to Shanghai after Kristallnacht. She was then 23. Kaplan herself was born in Shanghai after the war and immigrated to Toronto with her family at the age of two.

The book, which will appeal to young adults and beyond, certainly captures important parts of the story of survival. One surprise is Nini and her beloved's non-stereotypical survival. They manage to smuggle the family's European goods out of Shanghai to Harbin, near the Russian border. There they sell the valuables for dollars to Russian Jews, then smuggle the cash back to Shanghai via Japan. Nini and husband use the money to become partners in a bar (those "Ten Green Bottles") in Shanghai's French Concession.

In a work of historical fiction set in some of the same locales, **Angel Wagenstein**, a Sephardic Jewish Bulgarian screenwriter-novelist who was a partisan fighter in World War II, captures the big picture and the haunting details, the daring intelligence work and the heartbreaking ironies of life and death in Shanghai during the war. Wagenstein's ***Farewell, Shanghai***, translated from Bulgarian by Deliana Simeonova and Elizabeth Frank (Handsel Books, $24.95), mixes fictional characters with historical composites. Most memorable among those rooted in history are the blonde, beautiful Hilde Braun, the Jew who becomes private secretary to the Third Reich's representative in Shanghai; and the charming, elusive Vladek, whose nationality is "polyglot."

This may not be the most scrupulously authentic story of the Shanghai ghetto, but the drama is sweeping and the history largely accurate, right down to the files of Soviet intelligence on the Far East declassified in this century, and Wagenstein's recounting of the tragedies of intelligence ignored by the Allies. Angel Wagenstein is not the Barbara Tuchman of the Shanghai ghetto, but he certainly keeps history alive in a deftly ironic tone.

And in modern Shanghai, in the neighborhood of the fading snack bar and café signs on a brick wall, the story is returning to life. Israeli journalist Dvir Bar-Gal has started leading tours of the wartime Jewish ghetto and searching out tombstones from the destroyed Jewish cemeteries.

AMY STONE

ments themselves); Judith Baskin explores prostitutes in Jewish stories. And Bonna Haberman deconstructs the institution of Jewish marriage and its power as a national symbol in light of its concepts of ownership and gender-power differential.

Later contributors suggest ways to revamp Jewish law, institutions, and even theology. Many breathe new life into old concepts, while others are willing to oppose and eradicate antiquated ideas. Haviva Ner-David proposes ideological and practical ways to transform *niddah* rituals. Elliot Dorff defends the traditional value of confining sex to marriage, with minor adjustments, while Sara Meirowitz and Laura Levitt not only question Dorff's assumptions but challenge the societal expectation for marriage altogether. Levitt defines her vision of a healthy and spiritual erotic ethic as "radical mutuality, not tied to either monogamous marriage or longterm partnership."

Many of the contributors have academic backgrounds, and they do not always wear their learning lightly. The articles are often complex, quoting rabbinic texts and works of gender theory. (The glossary of Hebrew terms will be useful for many readers.) The perspectives they offer reflect the influence of such works as Judith Plaskow's *The Coming of Lilith* and Rachel Adler's *Engendering Judaism*, both of which endeavored to construct a feminist sexual ethic based on re-readings of rabbinic texts.

Many articles here urge readers to tap into a deeper, more personal set of standards that resist concrete definitions. In Ruttenberg's essay on modesty she questions the efficacy of rules about skirts or sleeve length, suggesting instead self-knowledge and "intention" in choosing one's dress. She argues that clothes "must enable her to feel the quiet but always pulsing connection to a sense of internal sacredness and to God's Godself." Likewise, Elliot Rose Kukla (the first trangender person ordained as a rabbi) encourages people to think differently, ending his article with the inspiring note that "every Divine Creature is entitled to be seen, loved and desired."

ALIEZA SALZBERG

Seeking That Deeper Place

From Judaism to Buddhism and (sort of) back again

"I had reached the middle of my life and knew less than I ever had before," writes **Dani Shapiro** in her quietly searing memoir, ***Devotion*** (Harper, $25). Shapiro can easily tick off all that is right in her life: loving husband, healthy child, charming old house in Connecticut, work that both sustains and rewards. But inside, she is falling apart. At night, she "quivered in the darkness like a wounded animal." She knew that "something was very wrong," but could not locate source of the trouble.

So Shapiro begins a tentative spiritual quest that leads her back to the Orthodox observance of her childhood, to present day yogic practice, the teachings of the Buddhists, Thomas Merton and many points in between. Quickly, we see that her relationship with Judaism is fraught. Her devout father was often at odds with her mother, who went along with his wishes, often with resentment that she did not attempt to hide from her daughter. For a time, Shapiro rejected her religious upbringing, shucking it off like an uncomfortable, ill-fitting garment.

Putting on my father's tefillin was so off-limits as to seem almost sexual.

But in the course of this book, we watch her circle back to the faith of her beloved and deceased father. In a memorable scene, she makes a trip to the Jewish Theological Seminary in NY, where a rabbi teaches her to put on her father's *tallit* and *tefillin*. "I felt a kind of slamming inside; doors blew open and closed at once…Heat rose to my face. It was forbidden territory—so off limits as to seem almost sexual." But she perseveres, and finds a way to understand both her father and the faith that governed his life: "Maybe this simple, repetitive act gave my father courage, each morning, to face the day. Maybe it reminded him of who he was and what was important to him. And maybe, through his example, he taught me a lesson about the importance of a daily connection to that deeper place."

Unlike Elizabeth Gilbert, the author of *Eat, Pray, Love* (to whom Shapiro will inevitably be compared) whose own spiritual pilgrimage led her thousands of miles from home, Shapiro feels the need to remain rooted to her surroundings. When a magazine editor with whom she works offers to send her on assignment to cover yogic practice in India, Shapiro declines. Her real work, she maintains, is right in her own backyard.

Shapiro's story does not unfold in a linear fashion, but is assembled, collage-like, from the bits and pieces of memory and family history that she weaves into a rich and satisfying pattern. The effect is both powerful and haunting; we watch her move from past to present, parent to child, confusion to a fragile sense of peace. While she does not come to accept the Judaism of her youth as whole cloth, she nonetheless fashions her own fabric—a way to live as a Jewish woman, wife and mother, on her own idiosyncratic terms.

YONA ZELDIS MCDONOUGH

Beneath the Black Hats

An anthropologist gains the trust of the ultra-Orthodox

Yeshiva Fundamentalism: Piety, Gender, and Resistance in the Ultra-Orthodox World by **Nurit Stadler** (NYU Press, $39) is a journey into an exclusive and isolated world of male yeshiva students, where the author, a social anthropologist, spent nearly ten years doing fieldwork. Stadler, who already had a few contacts with ultra-Orthodox families, convinced several yeshiva students to talk to her (naturally, outside of yeshiva premises). By dressing modestly and studying Torah with her informants, she was able to gain insight into their internal world. In parallel, she collected popular educational

materials circulated in the haredi outlets and asked her "teachers" to comment on them. Defying her own expectations, many young ultra-Orthodox men were eager to share their lives and struggles with a learned secular woman.

Stadler explored several aspects of the evolution of male piety in Israel's fundamentalist enclave: the so-called "evil inclination" (i.e. sexuality and control of sexual urges); renunciation of "profane work" and withdrawal from the Israeli labor market; exemption from military conscription; and the attitudes towards family life, gender roles and participation in civil society. Her interviews with young haredi men revealed that many feel frustrated by the limitations placed on their education, economic self-actualization, and participation in Israeli civil society by the confines of yeshiva life.

Throughout her analysis, Stadler shows that ultra-Orthodox fundamentalism evolves not only because of adaptations to modernity (e.g. by growing use of computers and other information technologies), but also because of criticism from within by new generations of devotees. She writes, "I met students who expressed disapproval of and dissatisfaction with their worlds, families, and contemporary rabbinical authorities." Some haredi young men openly voiced their frustration with the need to concentrate on the scholastic scriptural study that has no pragmatic value in the secular world. They complained that they were able neither to achieve excellence in Talmud (as only a brilliant few can do) nor to make a living for their families in the real world. Others expressed their admiration and envy of the military Israeli icons and their wish to join the army if it would be possible without severing ties with their families and community. Yet others were looking for a greater hands-on and emotional involvement with their wives and children, challenging the existing gender roles.

The haredi family is not fully isolated from the feminist messages and lifestyle changes in the Israeli mainstream. If in the past rabbis instructed young men to concentrate on their studies and let their wives take care of all domestic affairs, current rabbinical opinion (and popular family life guides) explain women's needs and struggles and call on husbands to show more concern for their wives. The new discourse on marital happiness promotes companionship and unity between the sexes. The process of "domestication" of haredi men also redefines the ideal of fatherhood and engagement in emotionally involved relationship with the children. Men are even encouraged to share hands-on domestic tasks with their wives, especially those who are working outside of the home and thus carry a double burden. The book does not refer directly to the haredi women's response to these incipient changes, but one has little doubt they are most welcome.

By and large, Stadler's research testifies to an ongoing subversion and turmoil that may undermine and eventually destroy the strict separation between the world of haredi scholarship and the rest of Israeli Jewish society: "The achievement of piety and the burden of domestic and existential tasks clash, producing frustration and tension. One of the likely consequences will

be a change in the fundamentalist structure of gender, especially the role of women and conceptions of womanhood in haredi public and private display." One can only hope.

LARISSA REMENNICK

Bible *v.* Bible

The intricacies of textual interplay

In her study ***Subversive Sequels in the Bible: How Biblical Stories Mine and Undermine Each Other*** (JPS, $35), **Judy Klitsner** revisits familiar stories in Genesis, and pairs them, sometimes surprisingly, with other, related stories in Genesis and elsewhere in the Bible.

Klitsner's method is to read the Hebrew text very closely, looking for parallels, analogies, and similarities in structure and character between her paired episodes. She mixes midrashic readings with the plain meaning of the biblical words, in an approach that will be familiar to students of traditional rabbinic exegesis. Klitsner writes in her introduction: "How is a modern sensibility to relate to a text in which God responds to a sinful world by destroying it wholesale?...What are we to make of a narrative...that has God and man marginalizing the female characters within its pages?" In response, she proposes "a particular type of textual analysis, literary in nature, that at the very least reframes the questions themselves."

In spite of the well-known rabbinic principle that "there is no early or late in the Bible," Klitsner begins with the premise that stories appearing earlier in the Hebrew Bible are to be read as chronologically preceding those episodes appearing later, which allows her to suggest progression, even improvement, in the underlying messages and cultural values she finds in the later episodes. She explains, "a later passage may revisit those questions...I call these reworkings 'subversive sequels'. Like all sequels, they continue and complete earlier stories. But they do so in ways that often undermine the very assumptions upon which the earlier stories have been built."

Readers who enjoy midrashic interpretation will delight in the combination of contemporary and traditional methods. Those who prefer a historical approach to Bible study, or who seek more reliance on contemporary scholarship, may be disappointed, as may those seeking to ease the sting of the binding of Isaac in Genesis 22 or the wife-swapping stories of Genesis 12, 20, and 26. Klitsner is concerned here with the larger challenge of exploring two major themes as they develop within the Bible. The first is the evolution of the self and its relationship to others both within and without the community. The second is the thorny question of gender relations in the Bible, and God's role in their evolution.

Some of her insights are startling. She compares the stories of Noah and Jonah, and concludes from her analysis that God is more willing to change and adapt than human beings are. And she compares the builders of the Tower of Babel, in Genesis 11, with the Israelite midwives of Exodus 1. Her sensitivity to language and structure in this story enables her to compare and contrast two episodes that on initial reading bear no relationship to one another, but which, on deeper analysis, yield important insights into the human capacity to change and grow.

She concludes from her analysis that God is more willing to change and adapt than human beings are.

DIANE M. SHARON

Love in Fascist Italy

Passion, and the peril of being Jewish

Set in Italy in the decade before World War II, ***The Jewish Husband***, by Italian author **Lia Levi** (Europa Editions, $15), takes readers into the same general territory as do better known works such as Giorgio Bassani's *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis* and, in particular, the Academy Award-winning film "Life Is Beautiful."

Like "Life is Beautiful," the novel (the first of Levi's works to be translated into English) tells the story of an acculturated Italian Jewish man married to a non-Jewish woman and focuses in part on the sacrifices he makes in order to save the life of his young son. In this case the Jewish husband is Dino, the narrator, a high school teacher of ancient Greek whose family owns Albergo della Magnolia, the Hotel Magnolia. The hotel is the family's business, but it is also their home. It represents the open, modern, cosmopolitan world that is soon to be replaced by anti-Semitic racial laws and other Fascist restrictions. So central is this theme that "Albergo della Magnolia" is the book's original title. "The Albergo della Magnolia exemplified my true essence, the life I lived before the gathering storm broke," Dino declares. At the hotel, people come and go, no one asks too many questions, and different social worlds and classes can connect, interact and even attempt to merge.

It is here that Dino falls hopelessly in love with Sonia, the beautiful daughter of a wealthy, staunchly Catholic Roman family (named, as it happens, Gentile) who are enthusiastic supporters of the Fascist dictator, Benito Mussolini. Dino agrees to renounce his Jewish origins in order to marry Sonia. But, despite the love the couple share, he never really fits. "[Y]ou want them to respect you, admire you, consider you one of their own," Sonia's worldly cousin Gherardo tells Dino before the wedding, describing Sonia's family. "In fact, it's entirely the reverse, their hidden contempt is not even all that well hidden. You are nothing to people like them, or maybe less than nothing because they are annoyed at the very sight of you."

Further, more painful renunciations come later, when it becomes clear that love (and assimilation) cannot conquer all, particularly not in the face of the mounting persecutions of the Fascist regime. In the end, the person in Sonia's family Dino feels closest to is her rebellious younger

sister, Lorenza, who joins the anti-Fascist student movement and becomes tragically involved with Dino's cousin.

Unlike the "Jewish husband" played by Roberto Benigni in "Life Is Beautiful," Dino survives the Holocaust by escaping to Palestine at the beginning of World War II. Once there, he cuts all ties with his past. The novel unfolds as a long letter that Dino, now a lonely pensioner, writes from Israel in 1967, just after the Six-Day War, to an initially unidentified correspondent back in Italy. It is his first attempt to communicate with anyone in Italy in many years. The letter, and the painful, passionate story that Dino pours out, are a means to reconnect his Israeli identity with the Italian Dino he had left behind and thus, in some way, make himself whole again.

RUTH ELLEN GRUBER

Some of the Best Minds of Our Generation...

Talking about Jewish feminism with wonder, pleasure and great respect.

New Jewish Feminism, edited by **Rabbi Elyse Goldstein** (Jewish Lights, $24.99) and ***Women and Judaism***, edited by **Rabbi Malka Drucker** (Praeger, $65) are two new anthologies compiled to promote dialogue about the future—the first between those of us who lived the last 40 years and our daughters, the second between Jews and non-Jews.

Goldstein's anthology, subtitled *Probing the Past, Forging the Future*, begins with a history of Jewish feminism. Judith Plaskow, author of the 1990 groundbreaking book *Standing Again at Sinai*, sets the theological context and provides a call to action for a new generation. Rabbi Donna Berman reviews the contributions of feminist theologians Plaskow, Rachel Adler, and Rabbi Rebecca Alpert. Rabbi Jill Hammer addresses the Goddess and Jewish experience, and Karyn D. Kedar, whose liturgical contributions appear in the new Reform prayer book, *Mishkan T'filah*, teaches that "God is not a feminist issue; expression is."

"One of the largest contributions of Jewish feminists may be their ability to rise above denominational politics and talk to each other," writes Rabbi Goldstein, who serves as the director of Kolel, a progressive adult Jewish learning center. The collection is rightfully self-conscious of the place of "first generation" Jewish feminists in forging the future. "Young Jewish girls today don't feel the need to buck the system anymore," Goldstein reminds us. "The dragons they slay will be of their own choosing."

Some of the 37 pieces are academic in tone, others historical, political or journalistic. For example, Rabbi Geela Rayzel Raphael writes, "At my own fertility ritual, women brought pomegranates, with their many seeds, for planting into the womb, and waved a lulav (date palm frond), both ancient fertility symbols, as well as chocolate-covered bananas standing straight up, definitely a modern symbol and definitely phallic." Contributors include best minds from every denomination speaking on leadership, social justice, gender, sexuality and age. They also respectfully refer to many whose work does not appear. The selections enable us to imagine dialogue among the authors; it would have been helpful to have an index to cross-reference them.

Women and Judaism, the first volume in a series *Women and Religion in the World*, consists of 14 essays addressing Jewish women's spirituality. Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso recalls the story of Judith Kaplan, the first bat mitzvah, and Alice Shalvi assesses a mother's love in a piece on "Sacrificing the Son." Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb offers her personal story as one of the first American women to be ordained and tells the story of Regina Jonas, the first woman rabbi, who was murdered in Thresienstadt. Rabbi Judith Edelstein provides a moving case study about her work as a chaplain to elders in long-term care. Poet Pamela Treiber Opper relates the stories of "Whispering Heroes," Holocaust survivors whom she treated as a clinical social worker. Joy Silver analyzes same-sex marriage and the Book of Ruth. The final section, on religious practice, takes us to St. Louis for Shelly Fredman's account of her experience in a Jewish women's group and to the *mikveh*, where we join Leah Lax as she explores the power of immersion.

These volumes reward the reader and challenge us to consider issues that lie ahead. They remind us, as Anita Diamant points out in the foreword to New Jewish Feminism, to sanctify what was not viewed as sacred in the past and to press on "transforming the marginal to the norm." The personal, lest we forget the first mantra of the feminist movement, is still political.

LAUREN KATZOWITZ SHENFIELD

Our Reviewers

FRANCES BRENT is the author of the Holocaust history *The Lost Cellos of Lev Aronson,* which came out in July 2009.

DIANE COLE is the author of the memoir *After Great Pain: A New Life Emerges* and a contributing editor of U.S. News & World Report.

RUTH ELLEN GRUBER, an American based in Europe, writes widely about Jewish issues and is the author of *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe.*

ARIELLA KURSHAN works as an anti-trust/economic consultant in Washington, D.C. and is on the board of her local (egalitarian) minyan.

NECHAMA LISS-LEVINSON, a psychologist in private practice, and is the author of *When a Grandparent Dies: A Kid's Own Remembering Workbook for Dealing with Shiva and the Year Beyond.*

LARISSA REMENNICK is professor of sociology at Bar-Ilan University in Israel. Her research interests include gender, family, and health matters in Israel.

ALIEZA SALZBERG teaches rabbinic literature and creative writing in Jerusalem. She is working on a Master's at Hebrew University and researching virginity in rabbinic literature.

DIANE M. SHARON, on the Bible faculty at the Academy for Jewish Religion, has published on the Hebrew Bible in its ancient Near Eastern context, comparative religion, literary analysis, and women's studies.

LAUREN KATZOWITZ SHENFIELD, founder and principal of Philanthropy Advisors, LLC, specializes in helping donors achieve personal, family and philanthropic goals.

AMY STONE, a founding mother of Lilith, spent two years in China as an editor with the Shenzhen Daily and the China Daily.

[**20-SOMETHINGS** *continued from page 15*]

"That I might love Tristan 'in spite of' his not being Jewish—like, 'Everything else about you, Tristan, is great!'—that's difficult for a person to hear.

"Since I moved out of my parents' house and our very Jewish community four years ago, I've felt very lonely in my Jewish ritual practice. It's a solo thing, every Shabbat is like a battle, and that sucks.

"So...in the long-term? Finding a romantic partner who's looking for something similar to you Jewishly would mean—automatically—you're not doing it alone. But finding these people? Totally a needle in a haystack! My brother is finding community, though. He helped build a community at college, and another one after college, and it's wonderful. He's modeling this for me.

"It's not that I would be looking for a Jew—it's that I would be looking for a really, really, really specific *type* of Jew—who practices a Judaism that's based in tradition but asks questions, who values the role of song in *davvening*, who understands sacred space, what it means to build community—so maybe someone non-Jewish, but supportive and religiously parallel, would make more sense.

"I don't know who I'm going to wind up with. I know it will be way easier if I find someone who overlaps Jewishly, but, I don't know, there may somehow be counterweights that end up counting more...you know?

Abby's Dating History

"THE FIRST PERSON I DATED AT COLLEGE, Amir, was religiously interesting. His father was Jewish (but not very practicing), his mother was not, and he was in the process of converting. My Judaism looked really different from his. We were both in vulnerable, searching places. Amir was just beginning to develop his Judaism, and I came from a Judaism that I loved, but I was now feeling kind of spiritually isolated and without community. We wanted different Judaisms—that's plural—and in our youngness it wasn't easy. Sometimes it came down to, 'In my Judaism we can watch TV on *shabbos*, but in your Judaism we can't'—which wasn't even really addressing how to share a holy day, and we couldn't resolve these things because, for us, there's no definitive opinion—we believe in 'customizing' Judaism—and we're two different Jews.

"So after Amir there was Zeezee. I met her when we were both counselors, one summer, at a camp for underserved youth. She was not Jewish; she was black, but she had nothing to say about her culture, so that kind of silenced me about cultural identity and about my spiritual or ritual anything, and so my Jewish observance always felt to her like it came out of nowhere. Like, 'Oh my God, we're in a restaurant, the sun's going to set in a minute, I gotta get the check, I gotta get the check, *shabbos* is coming!' She'd be like, '*What* is happening?' Part of our problem, I think, was that we met during this time and in this place where I was kind of experimenting with doing less Jewishly.

"Then, junior year, I spent my great semester on the Lakota reservation, and it was like no other place I'd ever been. It was very celebratory of different minority faiths, of the similarities we shared, and it didn't feel tokenizing because, in the context of

"Being Jewish is no longer a minority experience. As a Jew, I identify with Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants. I can imagine marrying a non-jew from a different minority culture, IF they are really committed to that."

the woman I met there, Ann, we were so intensely different. It wasn't like when Jews say to African-Americans, 'Oh wow, *you* were slaves, we were slaves!' in a way that's reductive and culturally appropriative. It was values-based, like, 'You have this very different story from us, but we extract the same values.' It was incredibly exciting.

"I felt very religiously liberated with Ann, very free to express my full Jewishness. I have spiritual ideas—about the soul, about the nature of humanness, about Torah—that I feel are kind of antiquated, I'm kind of embarrassed about them, but Ann and I had intelligent conversation about all of this, and it wasn't New Age-y, it wasn't empty of history and tradition. I remember sharing the story about Moshe striking the rock, and the folks there were saying things like, 'Don't undermine your tradition! Don't say, 'This is just a story.' *Revel* in it, let your mind get blown by your tradition.' That was unspeakably freeing. After we broke up, Ann said, 'The next time you have one of your holidays, re-examine your culture, give it more credit.' That has been a real gift, a validation, that came out of an interfaith relationship.

"And then all of a sudden queer Judaism seemed possible—this 'two-things-can-exist-at-once-and-isn't-that-nice' thing—and that became its own celebration: queer seders on campus (for Jews and Jewish enthusiasts, and queers and allies), queer Jewish movies and books, a queer Jewish student group. That's when I started dating Alpana, senior year, with whom I've been for a year and a half; we're still together. She's half-white/Christian, half-Indian/Hindu. Right away, *shabbos* with Alpana felt much more *shabbosdik* than it had ever with Amir.

"Because Alpana wasn't Jewish, though, and I wasn't Hindu, we screeched into these scarily future-oriented conversations, and I remember thinking, 'Who else has to do this, at this stage of life at this super liberal college? Who else has to talk about *long-term*? Two Jews don't have to talk about this!' We coined this word—'armadillo'—which means, 'Oh, no, we're in this forward-thinking pressure conversation, and we don't want to be here, so we're stopping.' Since then, I've realized that 'inter' couples get into armadillos: *inter*-racial, *inter*-class, *inter*-cultural.

"Alpana meditates every morning as part of the spiritual practice she shares with her mom—she never misses it—and I actively learned how to do it from her, and I take it seriously. Her tradition has enhanced my Jewish practice. At first we talked so much about religion—how we each pray, what we believe—and we were so excited about our similarities. But then religion suddenly got very difficult, we were butting heads hardcore. In Hindu settings I would freak out about meditating in front of a statue. It really hurt her feelings, she saw it as kind of colonialist: 'The British came to India and thought our traditions were 'folk' and 'simple-minded." She'd say, 'I know you're not saying the same thing, but you're essentially coming from the same tradition.'

"She has this guru—she has his picture in her room—she believes he's enlightened, like the Dalai Lama. And I find it hard to *davven* in a room with a picture of a big man. It just is. But we talked about it a lot, and I was like, 'Okay, Jews have 70 names for God' and she was like, 'Yeah, we have 100 different statues for God,' but ultimately it's one God—polytheism is a construction, too, the way Maimonides talks about a personified God being a tool. So that was a big thing for me to learn.

"Alpana and I, our theologies match. I believe in God, and believing in God makes me a bad match for most progressives, for most feminists. And with other observant Jews, the problem is that practice and spirituality are on the table, but theology and divinity are not.

"What I know about the future is that I'll have a Jewish household, without a doubt. I could never, oops, just misplace my Judaism—*hey, where'd it crawl off to?*—after doing *havdalah* on Rocky Butte. Would I want my partner to convert if they weren't Jewish? Unknown. Maybe if I was dating a Protestant white person we would really love the same music, the same art, we'd want to raise children the same way; other great things would factor in. But they will have to be willing to keep a Jewish household with me, with some kind of Shabbat and some semblance of kosher, and we'll Jewishly educate our kids.

"For my parents and grandparents it was obvious that they'd marry Jews. They had Jewish communities everywhere they went, they only knew Jewish people! For me, I've had 'opposite' experiences that make all of this harder, but these are also what have proven my Judaism."

[Susan Schnur, continued from page 13]

SO WHAT ARE MY FEELINGS, AFTER TALKING WITH these three young women? That if they end up marrying non-Jews, I'll feel very sad. But I have to look honestly at the legacy we've bequeathed these kids—a profoundly Jewish one, but also mix-and-match. At my family's seders, for example, we sing Guatemalan and anti-apartheid freedom songs, as well as Yiddish and Judeo-Arabic ones. I want to have my matzah, it seems, and eat it, too.

But maybe these twentysomethings will retrofit Judaism to match a shiny new, and very different, world. Indeed, the Judaism I live is often a poor fit for me: I don't believe in a traditional God; many prayers—and "*Baruch atah adonai elohainu melech ha-olam*"—alienate me; ritual circumcision (though I'm fully on-board) strikes me as gross if I, God forbid, actually think about it; traditional kosher meat is no longer the ethical standard for either the animal or the planet.

As I said at the start of this piece, it has recently occurred to me, duh, that the "normative" Jewish-American experience lasts exactly one generation. Sophie, Tali and Abby will not be marrying first-generation American-Jews from Trenton, New Jersey—about this, I am certain.

But they are literate and smart and stunningly thoughtful, and I trust them. ■

Susan Schnur is a rabbi and clinical psychologist. Lilith magazine has been her "paper pulpit" for over twenty years.
Philadelphia artist Molly Mullahy is a self-taught illustrator and portrait painter. To commission work and to see more, go to www.mollyworks.com.

HAPPENING

Bedtime Stories About Divorce

The Center for Women's Justice (*cjw.org.il*) which battles to protect women's rights under Jewish law, has created five videos featuring Savta Bikorta (her name means critical grandma), played by the comedienne and actress Devorah Evron. She reads aloud bedtime fairytales about real-life divorce cases handled by the Israeli rabbinic courts. These painful true cases make abundantly clear the need to reform the divorce process. *youtube.com/watch?v=pE5HBUzOVAY&feature=related*

The Role of a Synagogue When Marriage Ends

How do congregations respond to divorce? Sociologist Kathleen E. Jenkins advises that "we require an overall synagogue perspective that acknowledges the ending of life-partnerships as a complicated and ongoing process that can stretch out over years, affecting numerous lifecycle events and influencing children's religious education long after the divorce itself is final." You can read her report at *http://synagogue3000.org/files/S3KDivorceReport.pdf*.

Le Guide du Divorce Religieux (guet) en France

In order to diminish the number of *agunot* (women whose husbands refuse to grant them a Jewish divorce) the Women's International Zionist Organization of France offers a guide explaining to women why and how to obtain a religious divorce when they get a civil divorce. *wizo.asso.fr.*

Liturgical Experiments: A Siddur for the Skeptical

is the working title of this atheist-feminist prayer book composed by Tzemah Yoreh, who teaches Bible at the American Jewish University in Los Angeles. He writes that "prayer is one of religion's gifts to humanity... human beings can use it as a conduit for whatever they wish. I pray according to a structure and in a language dictated by my tradition, I pray for peace, the end of poverty, the end of hunger, the end of gender hierarchy, I pray that you pray for good." The full Hebrew text of this siddur (an English translation is planned) is at *religiousatheist.com*.

One Less Thing to Worry About

By partnering with local professional maid services, a foundation aims to offer free monthly housecleaning for four months to any woman in the United States and Canada undergoing chemotherapy for any kind of cancer. *cleaningforareason.org*

Encounter

is an organization taking Jewish diaspora leaders from diverse religious and political backgrounds on one and two-day journeys to Bethlehem, Hebron and East Jerusalem, exposing them to Palestinian life. The programs are designed as richly Jewish experiences, and participants are encouraged to ask questions and grapple with fresh perspectives across lines of enmity, to expand personal and political understanding, catalyze conversation between Jews and Palestinians as well as among Jews from across the political spectrum. Founded and staffed by Rabbis Melissa Weintraub and Miriam Margles, and activist educators Ilana Sumka and Shana Tabak, the program has brought over 750 Jewish leaders on these journeys. *Encounterprograms.org*

How Many Go to Bed Hungry Every Night?

A Kid's Guide to Hunger & Homelessness: How to Take Action by Cathryn Berger Kaye includes provocative questions, useful information and project ideas involving gardens, hunger banquets, clothing banks, emergency kits, building projects, food pantries and more, for grade 6 and up. The 44-page workbook is $6.95, from *freespirit.com*. (The answer to the question is 800 million.)

Mourning Experiences

Following her mother Beverly's death from breast cancer in 2008, Deena Fox received a number of books about the experience of mourning and saying *kaddish*, all written by men. She is now collecting stories from Jewish women across many demographic groups, ages, denominations and types of loss, in the hope that women experiencing fresh grief will be able to find common threads and thus be comforted. Fox invites your brief retelling of the most poignant moment during your mourning period. Send your vignette/essay of 2-10 pages by May 15 to *deena.fox@gmail.com* or call 646-337-8001. For more on how some women have mourned, see Lilith's spring 2009 article "Feminist Funerals" by Amy Stone at *Lilith.org*.

Dawn 2010

is a happening, and also a reinvention of Shavuot, the holiday commemorating the Giving of the Torah, when the Israelites stayed up all night at Mount Sinai. Reboot—sponsor of the biennial Dawn programs—describes itself as "a catalyst to catalysts—a growing network of thought-leaders and tastemakers who work toward a common goal: to 'reboot' the culture, rituals, and traditions we've inherited and make them vital and resonant in our own lives." Originally by invitation only, Reboot now creates replicable programs so others can gather, engage, question, and self-organize with their own networks, using magazines, books, films, records, local salons and gatherings. *rebooters.net*.

As it is Written: Project 304, 805

A year-long exhibit at the Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco explores the Torah as a historical artifact, ritual object, scribal tradition, and contemporary muse. Observe *soferet* (professionally trained female scribe) Julie Seltzer complete an entire Torah scroll, an accomplishment once reserved for men. The exhibit, through October 3, 2010, includes an interactive, multi-media art installation, The People's Torah, a Torah which will be "written" collectively, letter by letter (all 304,805 of them), by online participants in collaboration with visitors to the museum. *peoplestorah.org; thecjm.org*.

Women Soldiers' Testify

It might be more comfortable to imagine our daughters, sisters and girlfriends carrying out "different" assignments. The organization Breaking the Silence, founded at the start of the second intifada, brings us reports from women serving in the Occupied Territories. They describe the routines of controlling a civilian population and portray what they see as a moral deterioration of the commanders and soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces, in the belief that a society needs to know what is being done in its name. *ShovrimShtika.org*

Taking Steps Out

People from the ultra-Orthodox and Hasidic communities who choose to enter mainstream life are in many ways like new immigrants from a foreign land; they face cultural disorientation and isolation coupled with a lack of practical and marketable skills. Footsteps, founded in December 2003 by Malkie Schwartz, provides educational, vocational and social support to individuals making this difficult transition. (See "Leaving the Hasidic World," by Malkie Schwartz and "Yearning to Breathe Free: Refugees from Hasidism Tell their Tales," by Hella Winston in Lilith Winter 2004-5.) *Footstepsorg.org*

Stalking. Know it. Name it. Stop it.

The National Center for Victims of Crime has declared January stalking awareness month, but they have helpful resources for all year round. "Are You Being Stalked?" is a brochure with suggestions: call 911 if you are in immediate danger; trust your instincts; take threats seriously; contact a crisis hotline; develop a safety plan; don't respond to or communicate with the stalker; keep evidence; contact police; consider getting a restraining order; and tell friends, family, roommates and co-workers. *ncvc.org*.

Ezrat Nashim: Early Activists

In the early 1970s a group of Jewish feminists called themselves "Ezrat Nashim" (for the women's section of a traditional synagogue) and attended—without invitation—a convention of Conservative rabbis, where they presented a manifesto that women be counted in a minyan and called to the Torah. Nearly 40 years later, members of this group will share what it was like to be in the advance guard of Jewish feminism. How have they shaped their lives? How do they view the struggles remaining for future generations? Judith Plaskow will lead a discussion with Martha Ackelsberg, Arlene Agus, Leora Fishman, Eva Fogelman, Rabbi Judith Hauptman, Paula Hyman, Maureen McCleod, Dina Rosenfeld, and Judith Hyman Rosenbaum plus other members of the next generation. May 9, at the JCC of Manhattan. *jccmanhattan.org*

For events and projects taking place between issues of Lilith, check out WHAT'S NEW at *Lilith.org*, and sign up for Lilith's free e-mail newsletter. Send suggestions for this section to *info@Lilith.org*

—compiled by Naomi Danis

How Judaism is Helping Me: A HAITIAN-AMERICAN BEGINS TO SHAPE HER GRIEF

by MARJORIE ATTIGNOL SALVODON

IT'S BEEN THREE MONTHS SINCE THE EARTHQUAKE ravaged wide sections of Port-au-Prince as well as damaging Léogane and Jacmel, two important towns southwest of the capital. That's just enough time for the emotional aftershocks to begin settling for those in the Haitian *dyaspowa* [diaspora], like me. I remain shaken, yet so grateful that both my immediate family on my mother's side and my stepmother's are alive.

I have read U.S. news articles that repeated in startling harmony the things I've heard about Haiti my entire life—the abject poverty, the cyclical dictatorships and *coups d'état*—and the refrain does not now frustrate and anger me as it has in the past. Instead, I remember climbing the trees in the backyard of Maman Nelly and Papa Y's house in Musseau, now uninhabitable because of damage from the earthquake. I remember riding a donkey behind Mère Ta's house in Vieux-Bourg d'Aquin, playing with my brother Jean-Philippe in the yard, and watching small lizards with a mixture of palpable fear and fascination.

I am hearing things differently—realpolitik analyses about the strategic importance of the U.S. doing good in Haiti, President Obama's earnest call to action—because of having recently taken a non-credit course. Over 16 weeks, I was introduced to Judaism—the history, culture, language, religion, and philosophy of a civilization over 4,000 years old. Right after the earthquake struck, when I wasn't watching news or reading my cousin Jean-Paul's Haiti updates on Facebook, I was catching up on the required reading and completing additional chapters of *Aleph Isn't Tough*. I spent hours thinking about *tikkun olam* and the Jewish rituals for living and dying, and trying to recognize as many Hebrew letters as I could, from memory.

This class brought back my connections to Judaism and the Jewish community. I spent several years living in Brooklyn as a child, and I recall seeing Hasidim walking—women, men, and children—like a black, moving mass speaking another tongue. The Haitian immigrants who raised me didn't speak English, which made Haitian Creole and French our vernacular in the house and on the streets. I related to the Hasidim's difference by linking it to my own. The 'Introduction to Judaism' class also brought back my two trips to Israel after the first Intifada. While it was a tumultuous time, I made a personal connection to this country so far away from the ones I knew—Haiti, France and the United States. Though my family had religion—namely Catholicism and Seventh Day Adventism—I grew up uninterested in it. Yet in Jerusalem, something stirred in me.

I realize now that after my mother died when I was nine, my mourning did not end—because the adults in my family were devastated and were not able to help us grieve as children. Instead of engaging in rituals to actively grieve my mother, I pleaded with God to let me die and join her. When my death did not come that year or the next, I felt that God had broken my heart.

My Judaism class enabled me to imagine the possibility of nourishing an active spiritual life. This had little to do with connecting to the Hasidim in our neighborhood, or understanding the complexity of an ex-girlfriend with dual French-Israeli citizenship or even my husband's relationship to his Jewish-Eastern European heritage. I've learned how to live through this recent tragedy *by mourning*—Judaism has shown me how to move from passive mourning to active mourning, knowing that there is an end.

As a child, I pleaded with God to let me die and join my mother.

I *remember* the more than 200,000 people who have just died in Haiti. I remember listening to the litany of Catholic prayers, the wafting incense, and the piercing wails of my despairing *tante* Emilie during my mother's funeral. On Shabbat, Mark and I light a candle for Haiti and remember together.

Why does Haiti really matter? Not because President Obama says so, not because the U.S. wants to discourage Haitian refugees from coming to Florida, and certainly not because the U.S. needs to improve its image in the world. Haiti matters because our humanity is Haiti. Our lives are inextricably bound up with Haiti and Haitians. Haiti matters because Judaism teaches us that to be alive is to be engaged with the world, to repair the world. The initial period of mourning, of *shloshim*, has past, with concerted action to follow in Haiti. ■

Marjorie Attignol Salvodon lives in Roxbury, MA and teaches at Suffolk University. She is writing a memoir in French on motherloss, Haitian identity and language, entitled Nuits Blanches.